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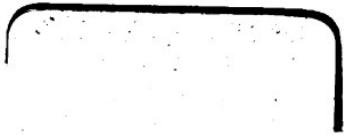
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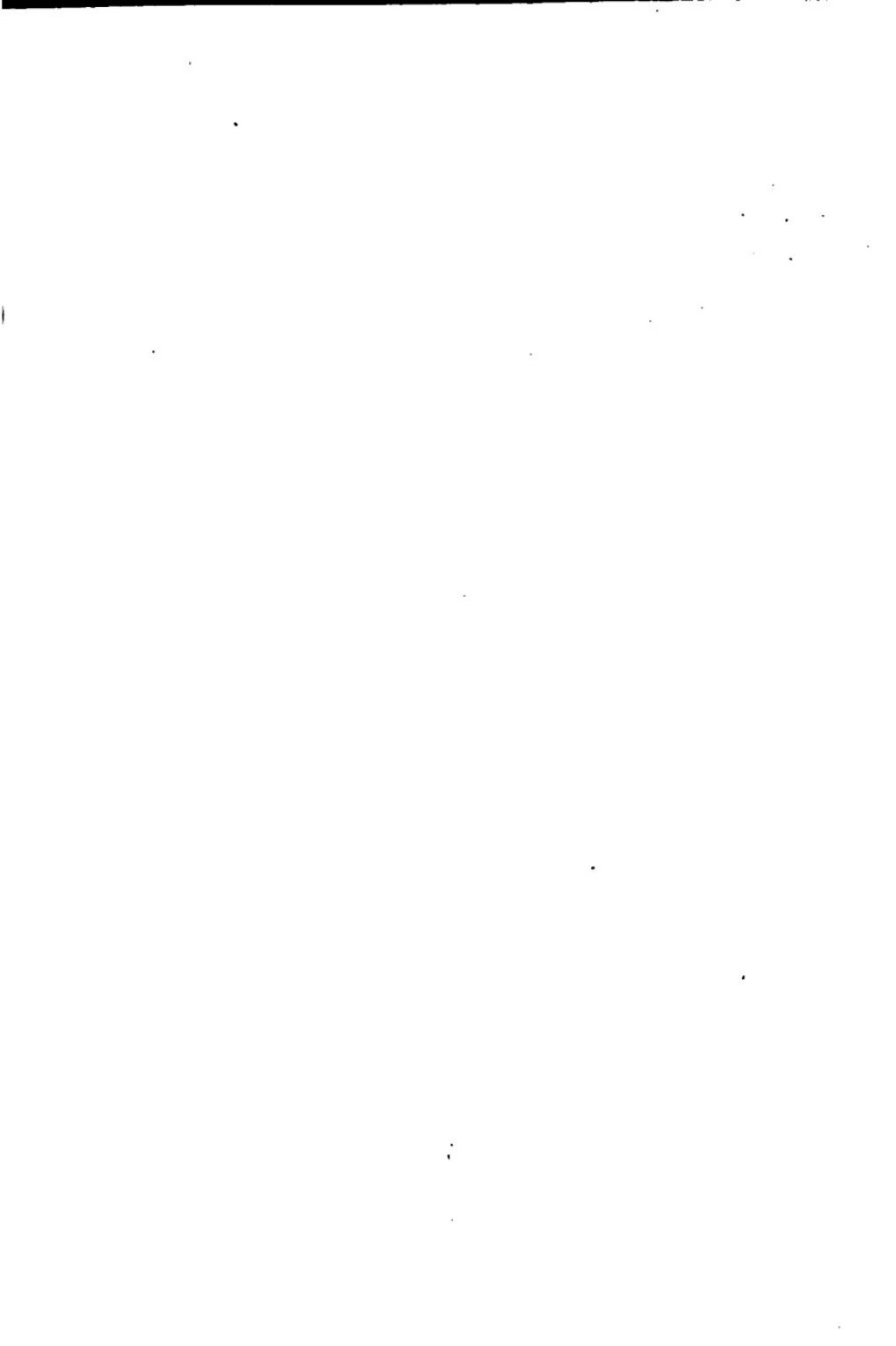
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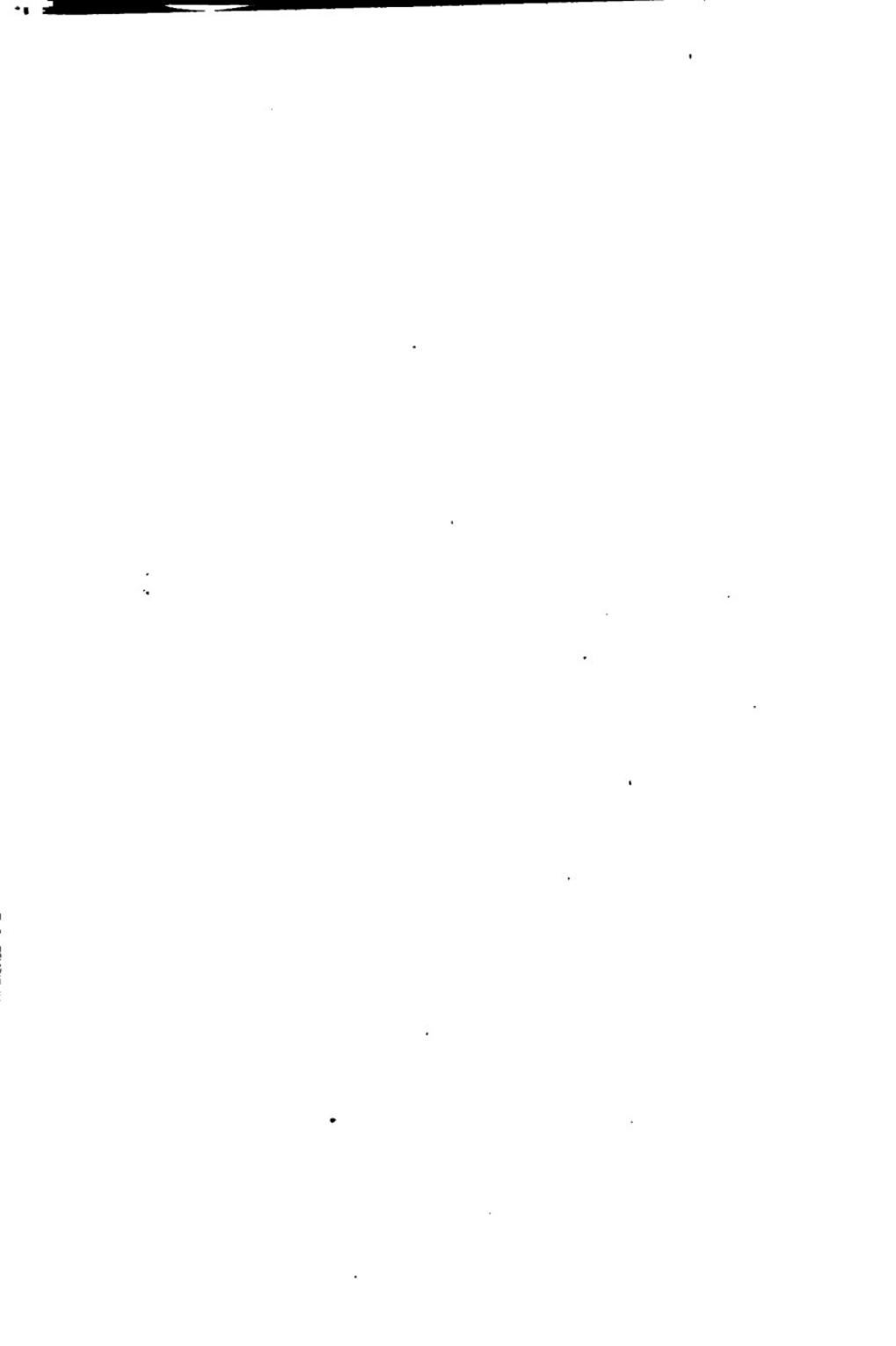
ELLA STONE







**GRACE MURRAY.**







"Yes, but we shan't have a bit of fun."—Page 3.

*Frontispiece.*

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# G R A C E   M U R R A Y.

*A STORY.*

BY

ELLA STONE.



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# GRACE MURRAY.

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## CHAPTER I.

IT is a large low room, with oaken rafters and curiously carved wainscot; the crimson curtains are closely drawn, and the only light is from the blazing fire of pine wood that crackles on the hearth, and diffuses a subtle odour that carries one away to dark pine forests and lonely glens! Here I sit and gaze into the glowing embers, and watch the fairy-like forms that rise and fall: palaces and castles, as changeful and as unstable as our own imaginations. And, as I gaze, the present vanishes away from me; the quiet fire-lit room, with its weird shadows, of which I am the sole occupant, has gone; and

out of the dim haze of an almost forgotten past far other scenes arise.

These, too, change and vanish, but they are linked each to each by the chains of memory! I hear voices that have long been silent! I see forms that have long departed, and, as the fascination of these fireside visions grows upon me, I resolve to weave them, as far as may be, into a continuous narrative; and thus people this earth, which has, for me, grown strangely solitary, with the friends of bygone years.

I will tell their story; I will strive to make their shadows live and breathe; while I myself will be to you, my reader, but a shadow impalpable as air.

The fall of one of the hot coals acts as the wave of the magician's wand. The red cavernous depths which it reveals expand and change, until I see before me, in all the calm beauty of a summer's evening, an old-fashioned English garden of singular loveliness; while at the same time the crackling of the fire upon the hearth

changes into the sweet voices and merry laughter of children, and, instead of the odour of pine forests, the air is laden with the mingled scent of rose, jessamine, and honeysuckle.

“ You are to come every day, and all the day, for I heard Mama say so myself! Won’t it be jolly ? ”

“ Yes, but we shan’t have a bit of fun! She is sure to be a cross old thing; governesses always are.”

The speakers belonged to a merry group of four children, who, gathered beneath the shade of a magnificent copper beech, were discussing, with mingled feelings, the expected arrival of a governess. The two who had just spoken were clearly sisters; and few would have passed either of them without a second glance; a glance which would rest the longest, and with the most pleasure, on the first speaker, a child of about ten years old. Dark rich auburn hair was brushed back in waving masses from a low broad forehead, and from beneath delicately-arched

eyebrows looked out eyes, whose hue changed almost like the chameleon's but whose normal colour was certainly greenish. A well-formed nose, sweet mobile mouth, and clear fair skin, tinged with rose, complete the picture. Yet the words utterly fail to convey any idea of the indescribable charm which drew all eyes and all hearts to merry, saucy, provoking Nellie Conroy; who, at that moment, was carelessly swinging on a low bough of the tree beneath which they were gathered.

The resemblance between her and her sister Ethel, who was about a year older, reminded one of the resemblance of an artist's sketch to his finished picture. The outlines were the same, the colouring very similar, but the tints were all fainter, and those finishing-touches which add so much to its beauty were lacking. The dark auburn of Nellie's hair was in Ethel a lighter shade, which her friends called golden, less kindly observers red; the eyebrows and eyelashes were almost colourless, the eyes a light

blue. Yet, notwithstanding these fainter tints, while there was less grace, there was more vigour and decision; less sweetness, but an expression of uncompromising truthfulness and sincerity, which, in many eyes, fully atoned for this.

The child whom they were addressing was very different from the two sisters. Most people would pass her by as a plain, quiet little thing; few would notice the clear, truthful, grey eyes and thoughtful brow, which gave promise of far greater intellectual powers than were possessed by her more brilliant companions; still fewer would guess what deep, sensitive, passionate feelings were hidden beneath the shy, quiet exterior of Grace Murray. The remaining member of the group, Laurie Conroy, a bonnie laddie of six, was the pet and darling of his sisters, and not less so of Gracie.

A shadow fell on Grace's face at Ethel's words about the expected governess, and she rejoined: "Oh! I do hope she will not be cross; if she is,

it will be no use my learning my lessons. I shall not be able to say one word of them, for you know how stupid I am when I am frightened!"

"Frightened! Nonsense," cried Nellie, "don't be a baby, Grace! If she is cross, who cares? It will be all the more fun to tease her."

Here the appearance of the nurse, who came to fetch Laurie in, broke up the party, and soon Grace was walking quickly down the quiet village street towards her own home.

Opposite a low ivy-covered house the child paused, hesitated, and then, opening the gate, ran up the walk to the pretty little porch, and tapped at the door. It was opened by an elderly woman, with spotless cap and snowy apron, who, without waiting for any question, said, "Mistress is lying on the couch in the drawing-room, Miss Grace; you can go up to her."

Grace hardly waited for the permission to spring up the stairs and enter the little room. Yet, speedy as was her entrance, we will just

step in before her, and take a look round. A room is often a sure index to the character of its occupant. I think it is Lord Bacon who says that the perfection of a lady's dress is for one to be unable to tell what she has on, and much the same may be said of a room; for when any one detail is conspicuous, even for its beauty, it proves that it is out of harmony with its surroundings. Who has not seen magnificently furnished drawing-rooms that fairly set one's teeth on edge by their inharmonious colouring and arrangement? while, on the other hand, there are rooms, the whole contents of which, appraised at an auctioneer's valuation, would not fetch the cost of one splendid vase, yet that entirely satisfy the most artistic eye, and give one a feeling of rest and repose directly one enters them. Such a room was that of Mrs. Somerville, at which we are now glancing. In the large low bay window, with its diamond-paned lattice, stood a stand of beautiful ferns, with a tall white arum in the centre; the ceiling

showed the dark oak rafters, and the pale, sea-green walls were hung with a few choice water-colours. On the little table was a basket of roses, delicate blush, pure white, deep velvety crimson, and the creamy Maréchal Neil, in richest profusion; a few other vases of flowers up and down, and several well-filled bookcases complete the list of its adornments, for the furniture was of the simplest description. Yet it was unmistakably a lady's room, and the lady who lay on the low couch by the fire, which even on that July evening looked bright and cheery, well corresponded with it. She was considerably above the middle height, though her slight figure and graceful movements made this less conspicuous than it would otherwise have been. Her age was probably rather over sixty, and the hair that was smoothed back beneath a cap of lace, trimmed with pale lavender ribbon, was of almost snowy whiteness; yet her face was not old! indeed, it was a face that would never grow old.

A beautiful face it was, with the calm stillness and peace of a summer evening. Not, however, of the evening of a cloudless day, but rather of one of storm and tempest, when the rain has ceased, the loud thunders are hushed, and over all has fallen a great calm, as when a voice said, "Peace, be still!" The storm has brought delicious freshness and coolness to the air, yet it has left its traces in fallen rose-leaves and battered flowers.

Mrs. Somerville's face bore marks of deep suffering, bravely borne, of peace won through conflict, of rest after strife, but not even to those who knew and loved her best did she speak of her past trials; they were buried for ever in a quiet grave, far away in a little churchyard amidst the Welsh hills, whither she had, one summer long ago, taken the boy who was her greatest earthly treasure, and by the side of his dead father, prayed that he might grow up to be a true-hearted, brave, and honourable man.

There had sprung up a warm friendship between Mrs. Somerville and Grace Murray. The elder lady thoroughly understood and appreciated the shy child, who made but few friends; while Grace poured out upon her that wealth of reverential admiration and passionate love which imaginative children often bestow on a friend older than themselves.

Mrs. Somerville raised her eyes from her book as Grace entered, and, as the child after a loving greeting, seated herself on the low stool at her side, smoothed back the soft brown curls, and inquired: "What is my little mouse so full of? Her face tells me there is a great deal in the little head to-night."

"Oh! Mrs. Somerville, Mrs. Conroy is really going to have a governess, and I am to go every day for lessons."

The tone was by no means one of unmixed satisfaction.

"Well, Grace," replied her friend, "and only the other night you were telling me how

delightful it would be, how many things you were longing to learn!"

"And so I am still; but Ethel has been saying she is sure to be cross, and you know how dreadfully stupid I am with strangers; I always say and do the wrong thing, and can't answer a question when I know quite well all about it: and then I look so awkward and silly; I have fairly stamped and cried with vexation at myself many a time. Shall I *ever* get over it?" and the child's eyes filled with tears.

"Poor little woman!" said Mrs. Somerville caressingly; "so you have worked yourself up into a perfect fever, all because of Ethel's foolish remark. Come, dry the tears; I think I can promise you that, if you do your best with your lessons, you will not find the governess cross. As to the shyness, I know, dear, how painful it is; but try to think as little of yourself as possible, and I hope in time it will wear off. And now for my news, Grace! Do you not want to hear that?"

"Yes, indeed!" said Grace. "What is it?"

"First, that Edward came home this morning; next, that he has passed far better than I could have even hoped. He is first-class in everything, and not far from the head of the list. He came unexpectedly, for he wanted to tell me the good news himself."

"That is splendid!" cried Grace, the tears gone, and her face glowing with excitement, as she threw her arms round Mrs. Somerville's neck, and kissed her again and again. "And to think that I was bothering about my silly little troubles while you had such grand news to tell me. How proud you must be of him! And now you will have your great wish, and he will be a clergyman."

"No! Grace," and Mrs. Somerville looked lovingly down on the eager, sympathetic face upturned to her own. "No, that is the one bitter drop in this cup of happiness—yet perhaps I ought not to call it so. Edward says his vocation is to work in another way. He has

chosen to be a doctor. It is not what I should have chosen for him. Yet perhaps it is for the best; few professions give more scope for usefulness."

Grace's face was shaded for a moment, and then, her voice sinking to a low, reverent tone, she said, "Yes! and *He* went about 'doing good, and healing all manner of sickness and disease amongst the people,' as well as preaching to them and teaching."

"Right, Grace!" But here the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the subject of it, Edward Somerville, who greeted the child pleasantly, and tried to engage her in conversation; but Grace had withdrawn into her shell, and it was a very demure little maiden who bade her friend "Good-night," and departed, greatly discomposed to find that this tall, grave-looking young man thought it only polite to escort her downstairs, and see her safely out at the front gate. This done, he returned to the

drawing-room, and, throwing himself back in the easy-chair, remarked ; " Well, Mother, your mouse certainly well deserves her name ! What a quiet little thing it is ! "

Mrs. Somerville smiled. " Had you seen her five minutes earlier with her face lighted up with eagerness and excitement over your successes, Ned, you might have changed your opinion ; but Grace requires to be known, and, child as she is, her friendship is worth cultivating. Her company has cheered many a lonely hour, and her enthusiasm over everything that is noble or heroic is quite infectious."

" Then, at least, Mutter mine, I owe her a debt of gratitude for your sake," replied the young man.

" Poor child !" added Mrs. Somerville, half to herself, " I fear hers will be a stormy lot; natures like hers seem born to suffering ; she will either shrink before the blast, or, like the mountain

pine, strike her roots deeper and be strengthened by it."

"What! are you turning sibyl, Mother? We will hope the latter part of your prophecy may prove true."

## CHAPTER II.

THE large village of Lynton, the home of Mrs. Somerville and Grace Murray, was pleasantly situated amidst the undulating hills and park-like scenery of one of the Midland counties. There was little to appeal to the imagination in the surrounding country. No lofty hills with vast expanse of view! No romantic glens or wild ravines!

The river, which ran by the village, was disturbed by no rocks, varied by no cascades, but flowed placidly and sluggishly onward through flowery meadows; reflecting on its smooth surface the shadows of the trees that grew on its banks, and the clouds that floated through the blue ether above. No inapt emblem of the lives of some who lived by its side. But flowers

flourished luxuriantly, many of the houses being complete bowers of roses, the trees attained their loftiest stature, and it was altogether one of those tranquil, sunny, home-like villages, which are only to be found in England.

The nearest town was the little cathedral city of Lynbridge, about five miles distant, where the grey old cathedral reared its graceful spire in silent witness to the faith of past generations. Many were the vicissitudes through which it had passed ; strange the stories which its bullet-marked walls and defaced images could tell of the iconoclastic rage of Cromwell's stern soldiery. Yet still it stood, stately and beautiful, and still, morning and evening, its silver-tongued bells summoned a little band of worshippers, who joined in the confession of the "One Lord, one faith, one baptism," that for over six centuries had been proclaimed within its walls. Those six hundred years had brought changes to all around, but the cathedral, the central heart of the city, like the central heart of

humanity, remained, in all essential points, unchanged.

It is needless to describe the Close, with its curious old gabled houses and smoothly-shaven lawns, where ecclesiastical dignitaries lived in dull but dignified seclusion ; or the sleepy little town, which was only roused into life and activity on Thursdays, when the country people poured in from every side to bring their produce, make their purchases, and also to see and to be seen. There were also occasional arousings when choral and other cathedral festivals were held. And once a year it awakened up for a whole week when the yeomanry came, and the excitement spread even within the precincts of the Close.

But we will return to Lynton, which indeed shared in many of the peculiar characteristics of a cathedral city, and chiefly in the absence from it of what may be called the “progressive class”—men who have their way to make in the world, who are still in the thick of life’s battle.

The straggling village street of Lynton was rather a haven for aristocratic dowagers and their families, elderly maiden ladies of high birth and limited means. It also boasted two baronets, three retired officers, a clergyman who had been compelled by ill health to resign his living, besides others who for various reasons were becalmed on the sea of life, and who, though of slightly lower social status than those before named, equally prided themselves on some real or imaginary advantage of birth, and on their freedom from the contamination of trade. These formed a little coterie amongst themselves, and, hanging on to the skirts of the upper ten, were patronised by them, invited to their garden parties, and basked in the sunshine of their favour. Indeed, it was one of the social privileges of a residence at Lynton to be on visiting terms with Sir Wilfred Allington and Lady Grenville. Nor was this privilege less valued because there was a tacit understanding that their invitations must not be returned, and

that there was an inner circle in their lives to which they must not hope to be admitted.

With such elements of society it need hardly be added that the general tone was somewhat narrow, and that, having little else to do, people busied themselves very greatly about their neighbours' business. They were apt to inquire somewhat closely and superciliously into the antecedents of all new comers ; and once, when the fact oozed out that one of the prettiest houses in the village was taken by the keeper of a London restaurant, who, having made a large fortune, wished to enjoy it in the calm and dignified retirement of country life, he was fairly hustled out of the village by the united cold shoulders of the inhabitants. As poor Mrs. Wilkins confided to a neighbour, "We really couldn't stand it, my dear, nohow. To see the ladies sweep past us, as if they were afraid to soil their dresses by touching us !—such pride ! People, too, some of 'em, as can't afford more than one joint of meat a week !"

Yet, despite these little failings, the good people of Lynton were kindly folk, bound together by a much closer bond of brotherhood than is now at all usual, even in villages. The higher class took a very warm interest in the joys and sorrows of their poorer neighbours, who, on their part, did not feel that they were doing anything inconsistent with the dignity of freeborn English men and women, when they touched their hats, or curtsied respectfully to any of the gentry they might happen to meet. •

Grace's home was situated near the entrance of the village, and its name, "The Priory," certainly seemed a misnomer; indeed, Grace often regretted that it was utterly impossible, by any stretch of imagination, to people it with the shadows of the monks of old, to conjure up a ghost to haunt the broad staircase, or to frame any romance whatever about it.

It was a white house, of moderate size, built in the Italian style, with a verandah extending

all along the front and one end, up the pillars of which twined every variety of creeping plant; the yellow jessamine of winter was replaced by the rich scarlet flowers of the japonica in early spring, these again gave place to clematis, woodbine, and rose, and finally, in autumn, the beautiful foliage of the Virginian creeper was conspicuous. Low French windows opened on to this verandah, overlooking a pleasant lawn, gay with flower-beds and flowering shrubs. The house stood some distance from the road, and was concealed from it in the front by a tangled thicket of shrubs, and on the north side by a narrow plantation of larch and Scotch firs, which sheltered the garden from cold winds, and was Grace's especial haunt.

Mr. Murray was a comparatively new comer, and came as managing director to an extensive mining company, having offices at Lynbridge, to which place he went nearly every day.

Belonging to a good old Scotch family, and of unexceptionable manners and appearance, he and

his wife were at once welcomed by the élite of Lynton. But Mr. Murray was a man of reserved nature, and singularly quiet habits ; and the delicate health of his gentle wife formed a sufficient excuse for them holding somewhat aloof from general society, in which they found little that was congenial. On good terms with the whole village, the only people with whom they were at all intimate were Mrs. Somerville and Dr. Conroy, who attended Mrs. Murray, and whose friendship they cultivated for the sake of his three children, whom they regarded as suitable companions for their only child.

Besides these, the visits of Mr. Wilson, the good old vicar, were always welcomed by Mrs. Murray, and eagerly looked forward to by Grace, who was a great favourite with the old man, who had lost the wife of his youth long years before, and whose solitary vicarage had never been brightened by the merry voices of children.

About two days after the conversation recorded

in the last chapter, Grace Murray made her way, as was her wont, with a book under her arm, to enjoy the summer afternoon after her own fashion in her favourite nest in the fir wood. It was a kind of hammock, made with ropes and sacking, suspended between four trees, and constructed by old Thomas the gardener under her directions, with many remonstrances and shakes of the head on his part.

"It was mighty queer," so *he* thought; "but if Miss Grace would have it so, why she must have her way." And so she always had, as far as old Thomas was concerned, for, crabbed and contrary as he was to the rest of the world, he was always his young mistress's devoted slave.

She soon ascended, by the aid of a friendly bough, into the nest, and ensconced herself most comfortably. And then, in a little while, having finished her book, she closed it, and also closed her eyes, that she might go through it all again in her own imagination. So absorbed was she that she did not hear footsteps approaching, and



"So absorbed was she that she did not hear footsteps approaching."

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when a voice called out, "Hullo ! what have we here ? a veritable sleeping beauty in the woods, I declare !" she let her book fall to the ground, and sprang up, flushed, startled, and angry.

"I really beg your pardon ; it was exceedingly thoughtless and rude of me to startle you," said the intruder, in a different tone. "My mother is calling on Mrs. Murray, and I was despatched here to find you, and ask if you will be so good as to act as my guide to Farmer Hollis's ; my mother has an errand for me there, and feels sure I shall lose myself if I go alone."

This long speech had given Grace time to recover herself, and discovering that the speaker was no other than Edward Somerville, she decided that, for his mother's sake, she could not be so rude as to refuse his request. There was, besides, something in the young man's face, plain and rugged, but so strong and kindly, that made her feel she could trust him ; and with a quickly beating heart she prepared to alight.

"What a jolly little spot this is!" Edward resumed, picking up the fallen book. "It is a shame to disturb you; but my mother wanted me to order some Morella cherries at the farm; and as cherry jam is rather a weakness of mine, I was quite ready to fall in with her wishes."

By this time Grace had reached the ground, and was walking towards the house, looking shyly up at her new acquaintance in some astonishment and bewilderment. Could this young man, who talked to her in such a pleasant, common-place way, even owning to such an ignoble thing as a weakness for jam, be the hero over whose successes she had so rejoiced, and whom she had placed on such a high pinnacle? She was half inclined to be disappointed; still, after all, she liked him.

"I shall have to run in for another hat and some gloves," she at last said; "will you wait here, or go in to Mama?"

His reply was to throw himself on the grass.

with a nod, and Grace departed. It did not take long to supply the deficiencies in her toilet; and after just looking into the drawing-room to see if her mother needed anything, and to give Mrs. Somerville a loving kiss, she soon rejoined Edward, who was glancing over the book he had picked up.

"Our nearest way will be by the fields," she said, leading the way through a small side-wicket.

"So this is the book you fell asleep over, I suppose! 'Ivanhoe' isn't quite the sort of book for a little girl, yet I almost wonder you could go to sleep over it," remarked Edward.

"Indeed, it is grand! splendid! and I didn't go to sleep over it," cried the child indignantly: "I was not asleep at all."

"Do you usually read with your eyes shut?" persisted the young man, laughing, "for I watched you for nearly five minutes, and they never opened."

"I was not asleep for all that," she answered.

"I had finished the book, every word of it, and I had shut my eyes that I might picture it all up in my mind; I always do that, it is almost nicer than reading. I had just got to where Athelstane made his appearance, and they thought it was his spectre, and were all so terrified, when you startled me." And Grace laughed heartily at the remembrance, having by this time got over her vexation, and feeling much more at ease than she had expected to do.

"And which of the characters do you like best?" questioned her companion curiously, wishing to bring out the child's ideas.

"Oh! of course I like Ivanhoe, and the Lady Rowena, she is so fair and stately, and good and constant too; but I think I like Rebecca better still, she is so noble, seeking nothing for herself. I am so glad Ivanhoe did battle for her like a true knight! And isn't Wamba faithful? I do like about him getting admittance to the castle to save Cedric." She used the present

tense throughout—evidently they were very real personages to her!

"I begin to think you were not asleep after all. So you like this kind of book as well as tales written for little girls?"

"Ten thousand, thousand times better," was the eager reply, "because they seem about real persons, but I haven't read many as nice as this. There was one, but it was all in poetry, and so beautiful—it was called 'The Lady of the Lake.' Do you know it?"

"Yes," said Edward, "and if your Mama does not object, I will lend you some more books, written by the same author, that I think you will like."

"How very good you are! Mama lets me read anything I like, at least anything we have; though, if the servants lend me books, she always looks at them first."

And now the child, completely thawed and grateful, chattered gaily, pointing out the beauties of the way, and telling of her lessons, her fears about the new governess, her favourite

occupations, and her friend Nellie, for whose beauty she had the warmest admiration, with an eagerness and originality that greatly interested the young man, until they reached the gate of the farm-yard.

Rose Hollis, the farmer's daughter, had been a servant at the Priory, and Grace had frequently visited the farm with her; so, no sooner did good Mrs. Hollis see them, than she hastened out with a warm welcome.

"Well, Miss Grace, and I am glad to see you! Come in now, do." And she led the way into the spotless kitchen, and dusted a chair for each of her visitors; which process, by the way, was a very unnecessary one, as not a speck of dust was visible, either on the chairs or on the polished oak dresser. "Now, to be sure, I said to our master some one would come to-day, for there was a stranger on the bar flew straight off into the bacon as I was cooking it for dinner. And isn't the young gentleman Mrs. Somerville's son, as has just come home? I

am sure, sir, I saw her leaning on your arm as proud-like as you please, coming out of church on Sunday."

"Yes! Mrs. Hollis!" Edward replied, "and although I have been at home so little since I was a boy, that I am almost a stranger to my mother's friends, I believe I remember seeing your face at church."

"Do you now really, sir!" said the good woman, greatly gratified; "I shouldn't have thought as how you'd notice the likes of me, though Mrs. Somerville, bless her, has a kind word and look for all of us."

"I came to show Mr. Somerville the way," now put in Grace. "Mrs. Somerville wants to know if you have parted with your cherries."

"No, indeed, I haven't, Miss Grace! You just come out and look at them—they're a sight to be seen. I should ha' had them gathered afore, but master's that busy in the hay: this spell of fine weather everybody has had to turn out.

We shall get the last load in to-night, please Providence, and then the cherries must have their turn."

"It has been splendid weather for getting the hay in," said Edward; "how are the crops?"

"Main good, I'm thankful to say, sir. It's a grand thing to know as the poor dumb beasts have plenty of fodder; it does go agin me to clem them, yet last winter we were almost forced to do it. Now, sir! look! there's the cherry-tree."

It certainly was, as she had said, a sight to be seen: a large handsome tree, laden on every bough with deep-scarlet cherries.

"It is beautiful, Mrs. Hollis, and the birds in your part of the country must be uncommonly well behaved to let it alone!"

"Now, Miss Grace is beginning to laugh! I remember how tickled she were when I told her of our contrivance. You see, sir, it was my son Martin, him as is gone to sea, he was always a 'cute little chap, and one day he comes to me,

and says, ‘Mother, do you want them bells as is up in the cheese-room?’ and says I, ‘No! why?’ and he says, ‘Wait a bit and you’ll see.’ So next morning he was up very early, hung the two bells in the cherry-tree, and tied a long string to them, which he put through the window in Granny’s room—that’s my mother, sir, as has been bedridden for six years come Christmas; she’s over eighty, and has all her faculties as clear as any of us. Then he runs upstairs to her, and giving her the string, says he, ‘Now Granny, pull away at that every now and then.’ Says she, ‘What for?’ and then he tells her all about it, and you can’t think how pleased the old woman is to think as she’s of a bit of use; it’s quite an amusement to her, and every year, since then, we’ve put up the bells as soon as the cherries begin to ripen; and the birds never venture near. Yes, sir! you shall have a peck of the finest to-morrow night without fail. But you’re never going without a bit or a sup of anything; you must have some of

my cowslip wine, and some of the white cakes that Miss Grace likes," and away she bustled, on hospitable thoughts intent, leaving the others to follow her to the house, which Grace, who was not above appreciating these homely luxuries, was by no means loth to do. Besides, she wanted to see the chickens and guinea-fowl, the calves, and numberless other objects of interest; so the sun was getting low in the west before they started on their homeward walk.

It was a much more silent one than as they came but Grace thoroughly enjoyed it, and it made her feel more at home with Edward Somerville, that he did not think it necessary to talk to entertain her. And when, on parting, he said, "We have had a very pleasant afternoon, have we not, Grace ? I think you and I must enter into a compact to be great friends ; you, a sort of little sister, and me, your big brother, as we have neither of us any brothers or sisters of our own. Do you agree ?"

She placed her hand confidingly in his, and said, "Indeed, indeed I do."

The compact was lightly made on the part of the young man, but it was a very real thing to Grace. The child went home with a new glad sense of possession in her heart; she spoke to no one of it, not even to Edward did she allude to it, but she rejoiced with a deep quiet joy over her "brother;" nor did she for one moment doubt his truth and sincerity.

As before said, Ethel and Nellie Conroy had been her only companions, and they were so totally dissimilar in tastes and disposition that, though Grace had a great admiration for their brightness and beauty, they were more companions than friends.

They delighted to tease her, and rouse the warm quick temper, which was one of the sensitive child's great trials, in a way that caused her to shrink within herself with a sense almost of inferiority, at any rate of loneliness. This new friendship was of infinite good

in developing the child, and drawing her out of that morbid state of introspection which, injurious to all, is fatal to the growth of a child's mind.

The walk to the farm was but the first of many pleasant rambles. Grace was never obtrusive, but the look of pleasure with which she responded to his notice made Edward often seek her companionship; she was gifted, too, with that quick intuitive perception which enabled her to enter into all his varying moods. Sometimes hardly a word would pass between them; at others, he would be drawn on by her sympathy to speak of the things that filled his own heart, to tell her of his plans, his hopes, his fears, quite losing sight of the great difference in their age; or again, she would chatter and frolic round him with a child's abandonment and careless glee. But, however it might be, there was never any jarring note in their intercourse, and strengthened by it, Grace passed through the dreaded ordeal of meeting the new

governess, and beginning lessons with her, far better than she expected.

Of course the time came, all too soon, for Edward to leave the quiet village and commence work at the London hospitals ; but he stayed longer than he would otherwise have done, to recruit his health, which had somewhat broken down under the strain of hard study, and quite long enough to leave the impress of his stronger individuality on the child's character at the most impressionable period of her life.

## CHAPTER III.

THE rays of the setting sun lighted up the burnished gold of the copper beech, rich clusters of roses wreathed the porch, the scent of jessamine and honeysuckle floated on the breeze ! All remained unchanged since the summer evening long ago when we first visited that pleasant garden. The same group, to whose merry voices we then listened, were again met together ; but Time, which had left no traces on the face of Nature, had changed three of the children into fair young maidens, in the first freshness of budding womanhood, the boy into a handsome youth of sixteen.

They had just finished a game at croquet.

“ You have won, Grace ; it is no use playing with you and Ethel. Laurie, I will not have

you for a partner again." And the speaker, Nellie Conroy, threw herself on the grass.

"It is good to blame your partner, sister mine, when you had put your ball out, and left him to fight the battle single-handed," replied Laurie. "I believe that will be the principle on which you will go through life."

"Why not?" was the laughing answer.  
"What are men for, but to fight our battles?"

"And what are women for, but to help them?" put in Grace. "To reward them with their smiles and favours when the victory is won, if you like, as in the old days of chivalry that you are so fond of, when the victor at the tournament laid his honours at the feet of his lady-love; not, certainly, to help to fight the battle."

"Don't get high-flown, good people. But tell me, Grace, are you going to Sir Wilfred Allington's garden party?"

The last speaker was Ethel Conroy, the eldest of the group.

"No," said Grace. "You know Mama is not strong enough for visiting."

"But you could go with us, Grace," said Ethel.

"My dear child," was the laughing answer, "I am only too well pleased to have so good an excuse for declining; I was sadly afraid Mama would insist on asking Mrs. Conroy to take me. She did propose it, but Papa took my part."

"What a queer girl you are, Grace," remarked Nellie; "Ethel wants you to go that she may display her new conquest, Alfred Hartley. You have no idea how devoted he is to her."

"I know Ethel too well to believe you," returned Grace, half indignantly; "it is you, Nellie, who delight in conquest! It is too bad the way you have treated Mr. Harrison—he went away looking wretchedly ill; and now you are trifling with Mr. Allington! How can you do it, Nellie?"

"Do give me a sermon on the duties of

women. I am sure it will do me good ; I will listen most attentively."

The girl put on a half-penitent, half-mischiefous look, as she drew Grace down to the grass by her side with a caressing movement.

She was indeed very beautiful and very winning, more than fulfilling her childhood's promise ; but she was conscious of her power, and used it in a way that often called forth Grace's wrathful indignation.

At this moment the click of the garden gate was heard.

"Here comes the Pater!" cried Laurie, with a yawn ; "he has some news for us. I can always tell by the sound of his step on the gravel when he has something to say."

Eight years had sprinkled Dr. Conroy's head with grey, but his figure was firm and upright, his eye keen and clear, and his whole aspect that of a man in the prime of life ; a kindly, genial man, with whom life had gone smoothly. He went up and shook hands with Grace,

inquiring after her mother, and then justified his son's remark by saying—

"Your friend Edward Somerville, Grace, is a very fine fellow. He has just done as plucky a thing as I have seen for a long time."

Grace's eyes lighted up with pleasure, while Nellie cried, "Do tell us all about it, Papa!"

"Just what I am going to do, puss, if you will only let me have time," said the doctor, giving her hair a pull. "You know that well by the cottages at White's Row. If I have told those people once, I have told them twenty times, that it was dangerous, and should be seen to. But country people are so pig-headed, they will never see to their drains till they have bred a fever, or cover a dangerous well till some one is half-killed! Well, this afternoon a lot of children were playing round, and a little urchin of Nancy Green's crept too near, and in he went! Then, of course, there was a pretty hullabaloo, in the midst of

which young Somerville came up. Hearing what was the matter, he quickly sent for a rope, took off his coat, and prepared to descend. Some one told him there was said to be bad air in the well; to which all his reply was, ‘The more reason to get the child up.’ They soon let him down, but the ascent was not so easy, for with having the child in his arms he was obliged to fasten the rope round him, and his hands were not free to protect himself from knocking against the rough sides of the well. However, he had landed at the top, looking very white, as I drove up. The women were all crying, and praying, and blessing him, but he just put the child in its mother’s arms, and saying, ‘I can leave this little fellow in your charge, Dr. Conroy; I think he does not ail much, and I must go home and change my clothes,’ he walked off as if nothing had happened.”

“It was brave, Papa,” said Ethel.

“Yes,” rejoined Laurie, “and the best of

Somerville is, he does things so quietly, without any fuss."

Grace said nothing, but her face spoke for her.

"Come, Laurie," said the doctor, taking his son's arm and walking towards the house, "I have an hour's work for you."

"Edward Somerville may be all very well," said Nellie, who had hitherto listened in silence; "but he is the greatest boor in society I ever came across—he cannot make a civil speech, and looks quite astonished if one is made to him."

"That means to say," laughed Grace, "he does not mean to flatter your ladyship, and has more sense than be attracted by your airs and graces."

"Don't be too sure of that, or you will tempt me to try my power."

"Pray try your best. I am not afraid he will fall a victim," said Grace.

"Then," said Nellie somewhat maliciously,

"you must be sure his heart is in safe keeping. Yes, Miss Grace, for all your demure looks, I believe you want Edward Somerville yourself."

The hot colour flushed up into the girl's cheeks as she said angrily and indignantly,

"You are horrid, Nellie, and I am ashamed of owning you as my friend. If you like to talk about yourself in that vulgar unladylike way, you have no right to bring my name in question. You know you are not speaking the truth." And so saying she walked quickly down the garden path, shutting the gate with a decided bang.

"How could you say it, Nellie?" remarked Ethel, looking after Grace's rapidly retreating figure. "You know perfectly she is as innocent as a baby of anything of the kind, and she is quite right in saying such talk is vulgar."

But Nellie only shrugged her pretty shoulders, saying,

"Oh, Grace will be all right again to-morrow,

and only reproach herself for having flown into a temper. I never could resist the temptation of making her flare up. She is so delightfully and ridiculously penitent afterwards. She quite loses sight of any provocation she may have had."

Grace pursued her homeward way, a tumult of conflicting emotions in her heart, and an undefined something which prevented her stopping, as she otherwise would have done, at Mrs. Somerville's gate to enquire after Edward.

He was at home for his short holiday, and the friendship between the man of thirty-three and the girl of eighteen, though their intercourse was naturally not as close or frequent, was as free and unrestrained as when she was a child of ten. He was Grace's kind brother, and, until Nellie's thoughtless words, the idea of a closer tie had never, even for one instant, presented itself to her mind.

Grace Murray was still a dreamy girl—

“Standing with reluctant feet  
Where the brook and river meet.”

Her life full of vague sweet possibilities, folded up, as the rich crimson petals and sweet scent are enclosed within the rosebud, waiting for external influences, the sunshine to expand, or the chill frost to blight their promise — the touch of the prince's hand to awaken her to life.

Love was, to her, a beautiful and wonderful thing, too sacred for spoken words; and her whole nature recoiled from the light foolish jesting of her friends. It would have been as impossible for her to have talked in the glib, shallow, matter-of-fact way that is so common, of love, or "falling in love," as to have taken in vain the still more sacred name of Him whose eternal attribute it is. But it was, as yet, a thing altogether outside herself.

She had dreams, too, of greatness and of usefulness; longings to express, in forms of beauty, Nature's strange, sweet harmonies, that filled her heart with restless longings.

Hers was a true artist's nature, and she had

already acquired more than ordinary skill with brush and pencil ; she had had few advantages, but her father had promised that sometime she should have the opportunities for the study of art for which she longed. Still she had never urged him to fulfil his promise, and had been well content to dream away her life, not yet awake to its purpose and its responsibilities.

On this night, however, as she tossed wakefully on her bed, Nellie's words ringing in her ears, and a mortified consciousness in her heart that she would never again be able to meet Edward with her old innocent frankness ; she began to long for action, and, thinking of her father's promise, resolved that the very next day she would ask him about beginning work.

In the morning she descended to the sunny breakfast room, full of her new purpose, and found her father already seated at the table, newspaper in hand.

"Your mother has had one of her worst nights," he said; "her head is very bad; if she is not better before this evening you must send for Dr. Conroy."

It was not anything unusual, for Mrs. Murray was seldom well; so Grace, after having run upstairs, as she always did, with her mother's breakfast, pursued her intention of speaking to her father. But she was altogether unprepared for the angry impatience with which he received her request.

"Let me hear no more of such nonsense! women have always some foolery in their heads." And so saying he took up his hat and went out.

The colour flushed up to Grace's temples. It was so unusual, so uncalled for: Mr. Murray, as before said, was reserved and somewhat cold in his manner to all except his wife, whom he almost idolised; but he was always kind and considerate to Grace, and never in his life had he so spoken to her before.

As she stood there, surprised, troubled, the

door re-opened, and Mr. Murray came up to her, and kissing her forehead, said, "I spoke hastily, Grace; think no more of it, my child, and we will see what can be done."

The unwonted caress surprised and touched her even more than his harsh words had done; and, throwing her arms round his neck, she cried, "Dear, dear Papa, it was all my fault for speaking of it at the wrong time."

He pressed her to him, and saying fondly, "God bless and keep you, my child," hurried away, leaving Grace with eyes and heart both full.

## CHAPTER IV.

FOR long years afterwards, the events of that day, even its most trivial incidents, seemed photographed on Grace's mind with intense vividness. The dress she wore, a pale mauve-and-white muslin; the scent of the jessamine that she fastened in her brooch; even the air she hummed as she sat painting a group of tall white lilies which she was doing for her mother's birthday, and which she took advantage of her being upstairs to finish. Yet everything was commonplace enough, only—it was the last day of her happy careless girlhood; from henceforth she must take up life's burden of sorrow on a woman's shoulders, and learn that greatest of life's lessons,

“To suffer and be strong.”

After her father left her, Grace tended her flowers, arranged the drawing-room vases, and then, with some of the choicest roses to brighten her mother's room, she went upstairs.

Mrs. Murray was feeling slightly better, and laughed at the idea of sending for Dr. Conroy, but said she would keep quiet for the rest of the day. "And Grace," she said, "tell Cook to make a pudding for old Mrs. Hollis: it will be a walk for you to take it across to the farm. I suppose everyone but my little girl will be at the garden party: it is really a pity you did not go with Mrs. Conroy."

"Darling mother, I would ten times rather be at home, if you will only believe me—I am always happy with you, but I feel such a little stupid, insignificant being at a party, the few wits I have entirely desert me."

Mrs. Murray laughed; and kissing her mother, Grace left, and was soon absorbed in her painting.

In the cool of the evening she went to the farm, and on her return Mary Hobbs, Grace's

quondam nurse, now Mrs. Murray's maid and faithful attendant, met her, and told her that Mrs. Murray had just taken her composing draught, and gone to sleep, hoping to wake up better by the time Mr. Murray had returned, and had had his late dinner.

It was now nearly his time; so Grace, throwing a soft white shawl round her shoulders, remained in the garden, awaiting his return. She lay back on the garden seat, lulled by the soft breeze and the murmur of the bees into a pleasant reverie, from which she was aroused by the sound of the clock, from the grey old church tower, striking eight. Why! what could be keeping her father? It was at least three-quarters of an hour past his usual time! She walked down to the gate, and strained her eyes along the white dusty road. No one was in sight, but soon two figures turned the corner; surely one was her father. No! They were Dr. Conroy and Mr. Wilson; and with a feeling of disappointment, but no real anxiety,

Grace left the gate and walked behind the trees.

Their footsteps came nearer and nearer, and then stopped at the gate ; they were coming in ! Grace went to meet them, saying, “Papa has not returned yet,—will you come in and wait for him ? Mama has been in bed all day ; we were very nearly sending for you, Dr. Conroy.”

But why did they look so grave ? A chill undefined terror shot through Grace’s heart as Mr. Wilson laid his hand kindly on her shoulder and led her to the seat.

“I have known you from a little child, Grace, and I believe that, for your mother’s sake, you can be brave and strong.”

The colour fled from her face, as clasping her hands she cried, “What is it ? tell me all. Is my father ill ? Oh ! take me to him !”

“My poor child,” said Mr. Wilson, “it is of your mother you must think ; it is she who needs you now.”

The girl looked up with terrified, uncompre-

hending eyes. Then reading in their faces the bitter truth, she sank down, wailing, "Oh! not dead! say he is not dead! My poor, poor mother, how will she bear it?"

For some minutes they neither of them attempted to rouse or soothe her; and then Dr. Conroy spoke in kind, quiet tones. "My child! he had no suffering—it must have been instantaneous; but I am very fearful of the effect of the news on your mother: you must help us to break it to her. If it were only possible to spare her to-night, and let her be strengthened by a night's rest, it would be a great thing."

He had touched the right chord, and Grace looked up with a white suffering face, but calm and quiet.

"I think it might be managed," she said. "Mama is always rather sleepy when she awakes after her draught, and there is so little light in her room, she could not see my face if I went and told her there had come a message from Lynbridge that Papa was detained to-night."

"If you have strength to do it, Grace, it will be far better for your mother," said Dr. Conroy. The girl's face was pale and rigid, but there was a light in her eye which told that she had resolutely braced herself for the task.

"I will go now," she said; "will you please wait until I come back?" Quietly she ascended the stairs, and, after a momentary pause at the door, entered her mother's room.

"Dear Mama," she said, "there has come a message from Lynbridge; Papa is unavoidably detained to-night; you must not be uneasy, we shall hear all particulars in the morning."

"Detained! What can have kept him? It is so very unusual," said Mrs. Murray. "Did he send no note, Grace? Who brought the message?"

"Mr. Wilson; he has been in Lynbridge to-day."

"Oh, then, he might not think it necessary to write," returned Mrs. Murray, quite reassured. "I expect some business has called him away;

he has not said anything, but I am sure from his manner he has been a good deal worried lately. However, we shall hear all to-morrow."

"And now, darling," said Grace, "let me tuck you up and settle you for a long comfortable night. I am tired, and shall go to bed too." Then bending over her to kiss her, she hastened to leave the room, lest strength and courage should fail.

She found the two gentlemen awaiting her in the drawing-room. "Mama is satisfied: she will sleep," she said.

Dr. Conroy had poured out a glass of wine, which he bade her drink, saying, "You will need all your strength, my poor child, and now you must get to bed yourself. Shall I send Mrs. Conroy or one of the girls to stay with you? I do not like leaving you alone."

But Grace said, "Oh, no," with such earnestness, and so evidently shrank from their presence

that he forbore to press it, and left, after bidding Mary Hobbs do what she could for her young mistress.

Grace no sooner found herself alone than all her self-control gave way, and she threw herself on the couch, burying her head in the pillows in an agony of tearless grief. It was her first sorrow; it had come so suddenly, and she was bearing it alone. How could she bear it? How could she face the morrow and her mother's grief? As yet she had shed no tear, and was conscious of nothing but intolerable pain, and a crushing weight that bowed her to the very ground.

She had lain there motionless, for more than an hour, when a cool soft hand was laid on her burning forehead, a loving arm raised her, and Mrs. Somerville's voice said, "Come, my darling, we must go to bed; I am come to stay with you. I could not bear to think of you alone in your sorrow."

The gentle voice unlocked the flood-gates of

her grief, and throwing her arms round her friend, she sobbed long and unrestrainedly. Mrs. Somerville did not attempt to check her tears; she knew that they were bringing blessed relief to the burdened heart and brain; but, as soon as she was able, she led her to her own room, helped her to undress, and soon the girl, pillowled in her arms, sank into the deep sleep of exhaustion.

It was late when she awoke next morning, and she had a stunned, bewildered feeling; then, seeing Mrs. Somerville seated by her bedside, all rushed back to her remembrance, and she cried piteously, "Oh! tell me it is all a horrid dream; it cannot, cannot be true!"

Mrs. Somerville soothed her as well as she could, and then told her that Dr. Conroy was already there. He knew it would be impossible to keep it longer from Mrs. Murray, and wished to be at hand when she was told. Mr. Wilson, too, was there, ready, if Grace wished, to spare her the task of breaking the sad news. But

Grace said, "I must go to my mother, and my face will tell all."

Why dwell on the scene? After one cry of agony, Mrs. Murray sank into a state of unconsciousness which lasted the whole day. Grace never left her side, and her anxiety for her surviving parent did much to enable her to bear up under her father's loss. Much can be borne when there is much to be done, and when Mrs. Murray awoke to fitful consciousness, no voice could soothe her but Grace's, nor would she touch food brought her by any other hand.

For days her life hung in the balance, and though Mrs. Somerville remained, and there was no lack of ready help, the chief burden of nursing fell on Grace. She would have it so, and Dr. Conroy did not oppose her, wisely judging that the less time she had for thought the better. She hardly left the sick-room, except on the sad day when she followed her father to the grave. Her kind friends had

arranged all for her, and Mr. Murray having no near relatives, Grace, leaning on Mr. Wilson's arm, Dr. Conroy and Edward Somerville were the only mourners. Many eyes grew dim at the sight of the slight girlish figure bowed down with sorrow. But her self-control was wonderful, for the last few days had changed the shy, shrinking child into a quiet, self-controlled woman. And it was well that it should be so, for there was yet more for Grace to bear and to do.

The hot sultry days of August had given place to balmy September, when long anxious days of watching were at last rewarded.

"The worst was over," Dr. Conroy said, "and with care Mrs. Murray would do well."

Mrs. Somerville had returned to the home which she had seldom left for so long a time, and all seemed settling down into the old way — the same, yet how different! — when one morning Grace was summoned from her mother's side to speak to Mr. Wilson.

She found him in the breakfast-room, accompanied by a handsome, middle-aged man, whom Grace at once recognised as Mr. Birch, a lawyer from Lynbridge.

After the usual greetings and introduction, Mr. Wilson said, " You have had much to bear of late, Grace, and I wish I could have spared you further trouble, but it is necessary something should be done. You have supposed your father to be a wealthy man ? " he questioned.

" I have never thought about it, " said the girl simply. " Papa always made me an ample allowance, and I never heard him or my mother speak of money matters."

" Well, that was the impression we all had ; and some four years ago your father made a will, which he placed in my hands, leaving me and your mother executors, by which he left a very large provision for you. But, unfortunately, since that time he has been led to embark in speculations which have not only swallowed up his own property, but also some

£8000 entrusted to him as managing director of the Lynbridge Mining Company. I believe he had been harassed for some time with the consciousness that things were going wrong, and a letter, confirming his fears and telling of the disastrous failure of his speculations, was found lying by his side, and was probably the immediate cause of his death. Providentially there is a settlement of £500 a year on Mrs. Murray and yourself, which the creditors cannot touch; but everything else, even furniture and plate, will have to be given up to them; and it is because they are getting impatient that I am obliged to come to you. I would gladly have spared you a little longer, my poor child." And the old man laid his hand kindly on hers.

Grace had listened very quietly; only when he spoke of the letter having hastened her father's death did her compressed lips and the slight tremor that shook her frame betray her emotion.

She now said, "Indeed I am glad you have

told me at once, Mr. Wilson ; it is right I should know. But I do not quite understand. Will you please explain to me ? Do you mean that my father owed eight thousand pounds to the company—that that sum is lost to the shareholders through his speculations ?”

“ Yes,” returned Mr. Wilson.

“ But that my mother and I have still an income of five hundred a year ?”

“ Yes,” was again the answer.

“ But that, of course, must go to pay the creditors. Dear Mr. Wilson, you do not for one moment think we could touch a farthing of it while my father’s debts remain unpaid ?”

“ My dear young lady,” said the lawyer, now speaking for the first time, “ you must not let your feelings run away with you. No one has the slightest claim, either legal or moral, on the money. It is Mrs. Murray’s own fortune, most fortunately settled on her at her marriage.”

“ A legal claim they may not have,” said





"For the first time Grace looked really distressed."—Page 65.

Grace firmly ; "a moral claim, which is equally binding, they most certainly have."

"It is perhaps as well," said Mr. Birch kindly, "that you are protected against yourself; the trustees under your mother's settlement would not allow you thus to dispose of the money, nor would they be justified in so doing."

For the first time Grace looked really distressed. She turned to Mr. Wilson, saying,

"Oh ! do help me ! I know nothing of business, but I know this cannot be right ; I shall never have a happy day until it is paid. It would leave something for Mama, and I am young and strong, and can work. It was the burden of this debt, not the loss of his own money, that killed Papa ! I know it was ; and how can I meet him with it unpaid ? It is all I can do for him now." And she burst into an hysterical fit of sobbing.

"Hush ! Hush ! Grace," said Mr. Wilson, looking much distressed, while the lawyer blew

his nose vigorously, and looked out at the window.

With a strong effort she controlled herself, and said,

"Forgive me! I did not mean to be so childish; and tell me what you propose to do." And then, her face brightening, "At least, if we cannot touch the principal of the money that is settled, we can give up the income, just keeping sufficient for Mama's wants, until it is paid off. They would not mind waiting, if they were sure of getting it all at last."

Mr. Wilson and Mr. Birch looked at each other. They had not expected Grace would grasp the practical bearing of the question so quickly, or have sufficient knowledge of business to think of this solution of the difficulty.

It could be done, of course; but they neither of them liked the idea of these two tenderly-nurtured women, who had scarcely known what it was to have a desire ungratified, reducing themselves to a mere pittance. Yet, if Mrs.

Murray were as impracticable as her daughter, it must be done. And after all, Mr. Wilson could not but own, at the bottom of his heart, that she was right.

"Well, well," said the lawyer, "nothing must be done hastily; it does not always do to act on first impulses. Your feelings do you credit, Miss Murray, but you must listen to the advice of those older and wiser than yourself, who know more of the world. You have yet to learn that this is a very hard, cold world to those who have to struggle with it."

"But what I propose could be done, could it not?" persisted Grace eagerly.

"Yes, I suppose it could," he admitted reluctantly; "but you will have to talk things over with your mother. I think it will be better for Mr. Wilson to explain matters to her. We intended leaving it to you, but I fear you would not do it impartially."

Grace smiled. She was perfectly satisfied now she knew that the money could be paid, and

she had no fear but that her mother would take the same view she did of the matter.

All that was involved in this sudden change from wealth to poverty she was too inexperienced and unworldly to realise, and, compared with the loss of her father and her fears for her mother, this trial seemed easy to bear.

Grace was quite right in supposing that Mrs. Murray, like herself, would not be content until her husband's liabilities were discharged. Very kindly and considerately Mr. Wilson laid before her the state of affairs ; and she, though realising more vividly than Grace had done the great change it would make in her own, and still more in her child's prospects, did not for an instant waver in her determination to give up all but a bare living.

She had little more actual experience of life than Grace. Since the death of an infant child, born the year after Grace, she had never known what it was to enjoy a day's real health, and her husband had shielded her with the most tender

and watchful care; while, if she thus lost the high privilege of being his helpmeet in the sense of sharing his anxieties, her presence was to him a calm, quiet haven, from all the vexing cares of the outer world—an atmosphere where all that was holiest, purest, and best in his nature was able to grow and expand. It may be, if she had known more of his business affairs, he might not have fallen into the fatal error—unaccountable in one otherwise strictly upright and honourable—of risking money that was not his own. The thought that he had done this was the bitterest drop in the cup both to wife and daughter, though neither of them would have put the feeling into words, or even in their hearts have cast the shadow of reproach on him they so loved and honoured.

Mrs. Murray was far from being one of those weak querulous people who must always cast their burden on another's shoulders; but hers was essentially a clinging nature, strong only in its tenderness and power of passive endurance;

and when the firm stay on which she had rested for nearly twenty years was removed, she turned to her daughter for support, and, young and inexperienced as the girl was, she proved herself worthy of the trust.

When Mr. Wilson called the next day, before going to Lynbridge to attend a meeting of the shareholders, they had tangible and definite plans to lay before him.

They proposed to give up four hundred pounds yearly of their income until the debt was paid ; Mrs. Murray only retaining one hundred a year for her own use. They would be prepared to give up the house and furniture, and suffer the sale to proceed in the course of a few weeks, there being a small but pretty cottage vacant which they proposed to take. Grace also wished to get a situation as morning governess as soon as possible.

“ I heard Mrs. Heathcote wanted one for her three children,” she said ; “ I think if you spoke for me, Mr. Wilson, she would try me.”

"Of course she would," he answered, fidgeting backwards and forwards, and making sad havoc with his hat brim, "but you shall not go there, Grace—they are gossiping, vulgar-minded people who would make you feel your position. No, child, it is the last place for you."

It was not often good Mr. Wilson spoke so energetically or uncharitably of his parishioners, but he had known and loved Grace from a baby, and the thought of what she would suffer as a dependant on a woman like Mrs. Heathcote was more than he could bear.

Grace knelt down by his side, and taking his hands in hers, said, "Dear Mr. Wilson, we cannot always choose, and it is you who have taught me not to turn aside from the path of duty because it is rough and stony."

He stooped and pressed a fatherly kiss on the young earnest face upturned to his, saying, "It is train time, we must leave it now," and hastily departed.

He had often felt, as all Christian ministers

must at times feel, disheartened and discouraged that he could see so little fruit for his labours; but here, at least, the seed had fallen on good soil.

The day was brightened for Grace by a visit from Edward Somerville, who came to say good-bye. He took both her hands, when they met, saying, "I have heard all, Grace, and I am proud of my friend." Then turning to Mrs. Murray, he asked, "You will spare her to me for one last walk; these poor pale cheeks look as if they wanted the breezes from the river to blow on them."

It seemed to Grace as though years had passed since they last walked together; few words were spoken between them, but Edward wrapped her shawl round her, and drew her arm through his with more than usually protecting tenderness; and it was very sweet, perilously sweet, to the poor child, so suddenly called on to act a woman's part, to feel herself resting on his strong arm, safe and sheltered once more.

When, still later, Mr. Wilson called to tender the creditors' warm and grateful appreciation of Mrs. and Miss Murray's honourable conduct, and a request that they would choose some of the best of the furniture and plate and whatever they wished to furnish a small house, Grace began to feel that in the darkest sky there are rifts which disclose the deep blue beyond, and went to bed with a lighter heart than she had had since her father's death.

## CHAPTER V.

"It's no use in this world your giving me notice, Miss Grace. I know when I'm well off, and I don't mean to leave."

The speaker was Mary Hobbs. Grace had just fulfilled the painful task of telling the servants that, although a month's wages would be paid to them, they would have to leave at the end of a fortnight.

The announcement had been received by the elder servants with respectful, silent regret, and by the two younger maids with undisguised tears. For the Murrays' was a good place, where servants were kindly and considerately treated, and it was valued accordingly.

But Mary Hobbs remained behind, and plac-

ing one hand on her side in resolute attitude, she delivered the speech given above.

"Dear Mary, you know how grieved we are to lose you, but we cannot help it," said Grace.

"Yes, Miss Grace, I know only too well how you've gone and given up everything—your lawful rights too, so that you have to bury yourself and your blessed mother in that poky hole of a cottage. But if you have only three rooms, you'll want somebody to do the work."

"But, Mary, we must get some young —"

Grace was not allowed to finish the sentence.

"Don't go telling me you mean to have a girl! Girl, indeed! Do you think I could rest in my bed at night, and think of you and your Mama at the mercy of a *girl*?"

Words cannot convey all the meaning the good woman managed to concentrate in that one word.

"It's as much as a strong, active woman,

with all her wits about her, can do to keep a girl in order ; it's enough to moither her life out."

Grace smiled at the recollection of sundry encounters between Mrs. Hobbs and certain girls who had filled the place of kitchen-maid ; but she went on :

" Yes ! you may smile, Miss Grace ; but, though I will say you have come out wonderful of late, you'd be like a baby at managing a girl. Besides, what with the quantity she eats and the things she breaks, a growing girl is the most expensive servant you can have. No ! I want no wage. I've had a good place, and I've not put my fortune on my back, as so many empty-headed whirl-a-gigs do now-a-days ; so I've a provision in the bank for my old age, and enough good clothes to last me ten years, and I mean to go with you and see to things for you, and, please God, we will make a good home for the mistress yet." And dropping her defiant manner, and throwing her apron over her head,

she sank down on the nearest chair with a sob.

Instantly Grace's arms were round her, and she in turn was clasped in her old nurse's arms, who rocked her backwards and forwards, crying, "My lamb, my precious lamb! how could you think as I should leave you? You, as I've nursed in my arms ever since you was a tiny little baby."

This determination of the faithful creature to stand by them in their hour of need was a considerable relief to Grace, who was fully conscious of her own and her mother's inexperience in household management, and whose brave spirit, undaunted by greater trials, had sometimes quailed at the thought of the little difficulties that Mary Hobbs' presence would remove. And now, with renewed hope and courage, she began preparations for the change.

The house, which, fortunately for Mrs. Murray, was vacant, was one which, at some former time, had been cut off the end of a larger

dwelling, probably for the convenience of some member of the family by whom it was then occupied, who wished to enjoy the independence of a separate establishment, and yet not be isolated from her friends.

It consisted of a pleasant sitting-room with a large French window, sheltered by a lattice porch overgrown with clematis, which also served as the front door: a good kitchen and back offices: three large bedrooms, one of which extended over a room in the adjoining house, which was occupied by Major Bennett, completed the dwelling.

There was a narrow strip of garden in front, separated from the more extensive parterre of the Major by a thick privet hedge! the height of which had been a constant bone of contention between the neighbours; and, indeed, had led to the departure of the late occupant.

It being impossible to ascertain satisfactorily to whom the hedge really belonged, each claimed the right of cutting it; and as

Major Bennett wished to have it high enough to shelter his garden from observation, and his neighbour was equally desirous of having it low enough to afford him a view of the pleasant lawn and flower-beds, it is easy to see there was not much chance of agreement. Matters came to a climax, when, early one summer morning, the occupant of the cottage got a gardener to cut down the hedge at least a foot. The Major sauntered out as usual to enjoy his morning pipe, but stood aghast at the sight. As soon as he had recovered himself sufficiently to speak, he gave vent to his feelings in language by no means permissible in polite society, though it was not uncommon in the army in his younger days; then, drawing on his boots, he hastened to his landlord, and declared one of them must leave; he had already borne more than an English soldier could be expected to bear, but the limit of endurance was now reached. It is needless to say that the occupant of the cottage, who was

certainly the aggressor in this case, had to depart, and so an opening was provided for Grace and her mother, to whom the sheltering hedge was as great a boon as it was to Major Bennett.

It must not be supposed that the inhabitants of Lynton remained uninterested observers of these changes. Since the death of Mr. Murray, and the disclosures by which it was immediately followed, the affairs of the Murrays had been the one topic of absorbing interest, and had been discussed from every possible point of view, by all ranks of the community. The feeling evoked was, on the whole, one of genuine and kindly sympathy and respect. Lady Grenville sent her carriage to take Mrs. Murray a drive as soon as she was able to go out; Sir Wilfred Allington kept her supplied with his finest grapes; "the evergreen" Miss Moores, three elderly ladies, who, with their brother the captain, lived at the cottage, sent jellies and delicate dishes concocted with a skill

that has departed from the present generation, and many others, poor as well as rich, tried by little acts of kindness and attention to show their appreciation of Mrs. Murray's conduct.

On the other hand, there were a few, chiefly belonging to that class of people who strive to brighten their own somewhat tarnished reputations by the severity with which they comment on their neighbours' shortcomings, who shook their heads ominously, and said, "No doubt Mrs. Murray knew what she was doing ; she would not give up such a provision for nothing.

"Of course her husband's conduct was most reprehensible under any circumstances, but there was something more in the background, which she was endeavouring to cover with this show of disinterestedness. They would say nothing. Poor thing ! she would need all the sympathy and help she could get ; but between themselves —well ! they could have their own opinion."

Mrs. Conroy and Mrs. Heathcote both con-

sidered it to be clearly flying in the face of Providence thus to throw away the provision that had been made for them for a mere sentiment.

And finally, Mrs. White, the curate's wife, who was growing grey and careworn before her time with the daily struggle to make ends meet, and feed, clothe, and educate six hungry children out of her husband's small stipend, remarked that, "if Mrs. Murray had had her experience of it, she would have hesitated a little while before she had chosen a life of poverty—though, to be sure, it was the right thing for her to do, and it made things easier there being no children; for children must eat, and tear their clothes, and wear out their shoes, no matter how empty the family purse may be."

But all the little buzz of public opinion passed unheeded over the heads of Grace and her mother. The unkind and censorious gossip they never heard. The sympathy and kindness they received with a quiet gentle dignity which

effectually prevented it degenerating into pity or patronage.

Only to two of their friends—Mrs. Somerville and Mr. Wilson—did they turn for help and counsel. Dr. Conroy, indeed, they felt to be a real friend; but he was a busy man, and his wife was one of those women, charming in manners, irreproachable alike as wife and mother, yet in whose arms no child ever sobbed out its tale of grief; to whom no one, not even her own husband, ever turned for sympathy in joy or sorrow. Ethel had more of her father's genial nature, and even Nellie would gladly have shown every kindness to their old companion; but there is something in a great sorrow which sets the sufferer apart, on sacred ground, from which the young and thoughtless shrink back with an undefined awe. Besides, their thoughts were taken up by Ethel's engagement to Alfred Hartley, the heir to a baronetcy, and a match after Mrs. Conroy's own heart.

The first step Grace took was to get her

mother removed to Mrs. Somerville's out of the way of the upset, and Mrs. Murray was well content to leave all arrangements in her hands.

She had resolved on taking all the furniture of her mother's room, and fitting up her new room so that she might perceive the change as little as possible; from the drawing-room she took her piano, easel, and one or two favourite chairs, and for the rest selected only the plainest and most inexpensive things.

There are some who know what it is to wander round the dismantled rooms of their childhood's home, and feel, as they take a long farewell of each familiar haunt, that a part, and that the brightest part, of their life is passing from them for ever, with the associations and memories that have entwined themselves around the dear old home. They will not need to be told how Grace felt, the dull pain that lay at her heart. But no word of sorrow or complaint escaped her; only once, alone in her nest in the

larch wood, which still hung suspended as on that day when her friendship with Edward Somerville commenced, did she fairly break down and make her moan. Then, angry with herself for her weakness, she hurried to the cottage, and astonished Mary Hobbs by the energy and skill with which she fitted and planned the carpet for her mother's room, working so hard that by night she was able to realise for herself that "the rest of the labouring man is sweet," and the aching heart was stilled in the deep sleep of the weary.

Late on the following afternoon she was giving a few finishing-touches to the room, and, mounted on a step-ladder, was knocking in a nail over the mantelshelf from which to hang an exquisite painting of the thorn-crowned head of "The Man of Sorrows," the only valuable picture she had retained, when the door opened, and Ethel Conroy entered.

"Mary gave me permission to come up," she said. "I have brought you a few flowers, and

Papa told me to tell you he would take the carriage round by Mrs. Somerville's this afternoon, about five o'clock, and bring Mrs. Murray safely here, so you need not trouble to fetch her. How busy you are, and how lovely you have made this room!"

"Do reach me that picture, there's a dear girl, and then I will come down and thank you," was Grace's reply.

The picture was quickly put into its place, and Grace descended, kissed her friend, and looked with delight at the basket of chrysanthemums and late roses which she carried.

"I was just wanting some flowers," she said. "Do you really think it looks pretty? I do want to make this room bright and home-like, poor Mama is so much in it, and I fear she will feel the change sadly."

"Not in her room, at any rate," replied Ethel. "This is, to my ideas, the perfection of a bedroom—quite as nice as her old one, if not as large; and downstairs, Grace, how you have

metamorphosed it. I can hardly believe it is the same house."

It was, indeed, a pleasant room, with its mossy carpet and soft white rugs. A large folding screen round the door, covered with crimson cloth, and a crimson mantelshelf, relieving the more sombre hue of the green hangings and handsome walnut wood furniture; two easy-chairs, a low invalid's couch, writing-table, and well-filled bookshelves, showed that it was to be used as sitting-room as well as bedroom.

"But now," continued Ethel, "I left Mary in a dreadful state of mind about you. She declares you are working yourself to death, and I am to insist on you coming down and having a cup of tea which she has brewed for you."

"Poor Mary," laughed Grace, "she is so unused to seeing me do anything that she can't understand that I like it, and it does me good. But I am tired now, so come and

have some tea with me, and then I will make myself respectable before Mama arrives."

The two girls descended together, and to Mary's great relief Grace got the much-needed rest, while Ethel arranged the flowers she had brought.

She had not long left, when the sound of wheels made Grace run quickly down the gravel path.

"I have brought your treasure safe and sound, Grace. Both of you be off to bed early, and give your mother a dose of the medicine I have sent," called out Dr. Conroy's cheery voice, as he drove away, leaving mother and daughter standing alone on the threshold of their new home.

On the threshold, too, of the new life that lay before them. A life as different from their past life as the home they had left from that which they were now entering; a life, poor indeed in all else, but rich in love—in love and trust for each other.

But it was not a time to talk of these things.

"Now, Mamsie, I can't have you looking into any holes and corners to-night; you shall inspect everything, and find all sorts of fault to-morrow. You must come straight to your own room now," said Grace, as she put her arm round her mother and led her upstairs. "I know you have had no tea, for I told Mrs. Somerville not to give you any, that I might have the pleasure of making it for you, and Mary has treated us to some of her nicest cakes."

The couch was now drawn up to the fire, and beside it stood a little table set with dainty china and a vase of Ethel's roses in the centre. Grace made her mother sit down on the couch, while she busied herself in removing her wraps, and strove, with light playful words and caresses, to keep in check feelings which both felt it was not wise to indulge.

She succeeded so well that that first meal

was almost a merry one, and when Mary came to remove the things she was surprised and relieved to hear the sounds of laughter.

"Well," she remarked to herself, as she descended to the kitchen, "young things *are* young things, and Miss Grace's spirit is wonderful; but I never thought she could have got a laugh out of the mistress to-night."

For Mary knew little of the philosophy of life, and how nearly tears and laughter are akin. Not till they were separating for the night did Mrs. Murray draw Grace down to her, saying—"God bless you! my own brave child; no one can tell what a blessing and comfort you have been to me. Yet I had hoped for a very different lot for you!" Then the girl sank down, and buried her face on her mother's knee, while the long-pent-up feelings of both overflowed. But there was a clear steadfast light in the tearful eyes, when, after a few minutes, she raised her head and said—

"Dearest mother! do not grieve for me;

while I have you to care for I am rich ; if I can only make you happy I care for nothing else, and I feel already that a life of work will be far better for me than the purposeless, selfish existence I have led hitherto."

"He led them forth by the right way," softly murmured Mrs. Murray. "I fear I sometimes forget who has chosen our path ; it has been thorny, Grace, but we have not been left to tread it alone."

Grace could not trust herself to answer, but with a last kiss departed to her own little room.

## CHAPTER VI.

IN a very few days Grace made preparations for beginning work.

In compliance with her entreaty, Mr. Wilson had applied to Mrs. Heathcote on her behalf; for, reluctant as he was to do so, he was quite aware of the difficulty, almost impossibility, of meeting with any other situation at Lynton.

Aware, too, that Mrs. Heathcote—who for the last two years had found resident governesses, as she said, “the plague of her life”—would find an equal difficulty in procuring any other competent daily governess, and that he would therefore be able to make better terms for his favourite than he could otherwise have hoped to do. Indeed, when he opened out his errand

to Mrs. Heathcote, he found that lady most complaisant.

It is true that, at first, she tried hard to beat him down as to terms, dwelling much on Grace's youth and inexperience; but when she found her efforts were unavailing, she gave in with a good grace, being too much alive to the advantages of the arrangement to run any risk of letting it slip through.

Besides, it was worth something to be able to say to her friends, "I felt it was really a charity to take poor Miss Murray; and I am giving her nearly double what I should have paid any one else. It is one of the blessings of wealth to be able to help those in need."

Truth to tell, Mrs. Heathcote had an unpleasant consciousness that the wealth of which she was so proud, which rustled in every fold of her silk dress, and was emblazoned on the costly furniture of her well-appointed house, had not purchased for her that consideration,

in aristocratic Lynton, to which she felt it entitled her. She was inclined to lay the blame on her husband, a quiet, inoffensive, much-enduring man, who was so completely kept under by his wife that he was really unable to assert himself, as she would have wished him to do outside his own home.

Any way, it was galling to feel that Miss Hardy, who had only a small pension to live on, and Mrs. Somerville, who kept but one servant, were admitted by the *élite* of the village on terms of equality, while she was left altogether outside the charmed circle; and to have one of its members in her power, a recipient as she considered of her bounty, was a species of revenge, not on Grace, but on the class to which she belonged, that, to her, was very sweet; and she gladly agreed to call the next day and arrange with Grace to come daily, from nine till one o'clock, to instruct her three children.

Much to Grace's relief, her mother was rest-

ing, when Mrs. Heathcote, enveloped in silks and furs, rustled into their little room.

She glanced curiously round, and then remarked, "This is a sad change for you, Miss Murray; I am sure every one has sympathised with you most sincerely. I often said to my husband I wished we could do something for you, and I thought it quite providential when Mr. Wilson called to ask about my situation."

"I was very glad to hear of it," answered Grace simply, "and I hope I shall be able to give you satisfaction."

"Well, my dear, of course you are inexperienced, and I should certainly not have given such terms to any one else; but under the circumstances——"

"But," interrupted Grace, hot and uncomfortable, "I should not wish——"

"Hush, hush, not a word; I know what you would say, but Mr. Wilson and I have arranged all that. I shall not miss it, and I could not

feel comfortable if I did not know that you and your mother had enough for all your reasonable wants. I should think, with proper management, you will do very well now; as I was saying to my husband last night, you will be better off than those poor Whites. We reckoned up what their income would be a head, and we came to the conclusion they must have help from somewhere, or they could never keep body and soul together. Ah! it's a great mistake for poor curates to marry. You are young and free, so I hope you will better your position by marrying, not make it worse, as poor Mrs. White has done. I shall make a point, my dear, of inviting you to meet my friends, and giving you every advantage I can in the way of society."

Poor Grace! Was this what she would have to endure? Never in her whole life had she had such difficulty in keeping her unruly member quiet, and smothering the hot indignant disclaimer that rose to her lips. She mastered

herself sufficiently to say very quietly, and with what Mrs. Heathcote thought strange want of appreciation of her kindness,

"Then I may consider I have to begin work next Monday, Mrs. Heathcote?"

"Yes, certainly; and I hope, dear Miss Murray, you will make a point of being punctual, it is such an important thing in a governess; a quarter of an hour, more or less, seems very little, but morning after morning it mounts up to a great deal, and, as I sometimes say to my servants, when I pay you for your time I consider it is mine."

"I will take care to be punctual," replied Grace. She could not trust her voice to say more.

"Oh! I am sure you will," returned Mrs. Heathcote graciously; "I need hardly have reminded you, but it is always well to be plain at first. I am sorry to have missed seeing Mrs. Murray; remember me very kindly to her; I

have not had the pleasure of knowing much of her hitherto, but I hope I shall now. One of the great uses of adversity is that we find out who are our true friends. Good-bye, my dear."

And she sailed out of the room, carrying with her the pleasant consciousness of having done a good deed in the kindest possible way, and also of having asserted the omnipotence of wealth. "They would hardly look the way I was, in old days, but they are glad enough to be friends now," she thought.

She left behind her a cold, dull, east-wind atmosphere. Grace glanced round the little room, only an hour since it had looked so bright and home-like, had it suddenly grown poor and mean? The autumn sunshine was streaming in then; had it suddenly ceased to shine? For Grace, at least, it had; and with anger, humiliation, and mortified pride struggling for the mastery, she rushed off to her own room,

and gave vent to her feelings in a passion of bitter tears.

Poor child ! for she was after all little more than a child in years, to her sensitive, refined nature all that had been said had been most galling.

Fortunately for Grace, together with sensitiveness and refinement, she had also strong common sense, and a quick sense of humour which often served the purpose of the thick prickly outer leaves of a plant, preserving the delicate blossoms from injury. By tea-time she had recovered herself sufficiently to give her mother a graphic sketch of the interview, from which all that could pain or wound was carefully omitted, all that was amusing retained ; and in laughing over and enlarging upon the brilliant prospects held out to her by Mrs. Heathcote's proposed introductions the sting was taken away, so that when Mrs. Murray remarked, "I really think she means

very well, Grace," she was able to answer truthfully,

"I really think she does, Mama, though, all the same, I sha'n't let her come to see you much."

## CHAPTER VII.

OVER eighteen months have passed since we left Grace beginning work at Mrs. Heathcote's.

Quiet months they have been, their monotony broken only by the marriage of Ethel Conroy, the departure of her sister Nellie, two months ago, to visit her in her London home, and a visit of Edward Somerville's to his mother, during which he had laid himself out, by every kind and thoughtful attention, to brighten, what seemed to him, the hard lot of the girl.

But Grace herself never thought of her lot being a hard one. It had been, on the whole, a happy time to her.

At first it had been very up-hill work, and

many a time she would have given up in despair but for the wise counsels and encouragement of Mrs. Somerville, to whom alone she could confide her difficulties. The children were rude and lawless. Alice, the eldest, painfully dull ; Maud, quick and pert to an equally painful degree ; while Philip, the only boy, tyrannised over the whole family, and intimated to Grace, the first day, "that it was no use for her to go telling tales of him to Mama, for she wouldn't have him punished for anybody." Poor Grace used to return home feeling fairly battered, worn out, and hopeless. But in about a week things began to mend. The children saw that, notwithstanding her gentleness, Grace would be obeyed, and respected her accordingly ; and when at last Philip constituted himself her champion, she felt the victory was won, and so it was. Henceforth, though she had to contend with the trials and disappointments inseparable from teaching, she had gained the hearts of the children, and

had no difficulty in maintaining rule and order.

As to Mrs. Heathcote, when she found that Grace quietly but steadily refused all her invitations, and preferred to accept her position as governess and dependant rather than pose as Mrs. Heathcote's "dear young friend, in whom she took such warm interest," she was content to let her alone, only lamenting to her friends "that poor Miss Murray let her foolish pride stand sadly in her own light."

It could not be but that, between natures so antagonistic, jarring notes should occasionally be struck ; but Grace's sensitiveness had worn off a little with contact with the world, and Mrs. Heathcote had learned to value her services too highly, intentionally to wound her feelings.

Then there were always the long evenings with her mother, spent in working and reading aloud some of their favourite books ; the cosy chat in the twilight, when, seated on a

low stool, she rested her head on her mother's knee; the afternoons, generally devoted to painting—as her mother thought for amusement—really with the fixed purpose ever present in her mind of, one day, making it her profession.

It was wonderful, so Grace sometimes thought, how full life seemed now to what it had done in the old prosperous days.

"I declare, *Mamsie*," she said playfully one day as she displayed a hat which she had just made up out of some old materials, "it would have been a sheer waste of talent if we had continued rich. I believe I have a genius for making 'auld claes look amaint as weel's the new,' and Mary says I can make bread as well as she can."

"At least," replied Mrs. Murray, looking fondly at her, "our change of fortune has taught me what a treasure my daughter is."

"Nay, mother," said the girl, half blushing,

"I was not fishing for compliments, though I admit it did look suspiciously like it."

It was, in truth, a happy contented little household; if their means were limited they were sufficient for their actual wants, and they knew nothing of that wretched struggle to keep up appearances—or rather, to make a false appearance—which constitutes half the misery and all the degradation of poverty.

Grace, indeed, was rapidly developing both in heart and intellect under the healthy conditions of her life. Work which fully occupied her, a definite object at which to aim, a deep love for her mother, which rendered self-sacrifice for her sake a joy, and, last of all, a fair sweet hope which had crept into her life unawares, and which, though still unconfessed even to herself, was beautiful as the first faint tender streaks of light in the morning sky which announce that the dawn is near.

On the day on which we again take up the thread of her story, a bright April afternoon,

Grace was seated, as usual, at her easel. She was alone, for it was Mrs. Murray's hour for rest; and a close observer might have noticed tokens of unusual care in her simple toilet—very slight tokens certainly, for Grace was always neat. The soft brown hair was smoothly braided and coiled into a thick knot at the back, the frills that set off her black dress were of snowy whiteness, and a bunch of blue and white violets was fastened in her brooch. Ever and anon her eyes strayed from her work to the garden path, and a smile played round her lips, that seemed to tell of happy thoughts within.

It was not long before steps were heard, and with a glad light in her eyes, a slightly deepened colour in her cheeks, Grace opened the door to Edward Somerville.

"Is it really you, Grace? Let me look twice and see if it is indeed my old playmate," he said, taking her hand, and drawing her, half blushing, into the sunlight. "You are looking





"Surely this is a great advance on anything I have seen of yours."

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so well ; and what have we here ? ” stopping before the easel. “ Surely this is a great advance on anything I have seen of yours.”

“ Do you really think so ? ” she cried eagerly, all self-consciousness gone. It was a simple, somewhat hackneyed subject, a thrush’s nest and primroses ; but it was instinct with all the poetry of spring ; the lights and shadows of an April sky played on “ the five blue eggs together laid,” and the covering of autumn leaves from which the fair young buds of spring arose, uttered their voiceless parable to all who had hearts to receive it.

“ I generally choose these subjects, for I can copy more from nature, and she is still my only teacher.”

“ A good one, too ; but you must have lessons, Grace. My mother did not tell my news, did she ? ”

“ No,” said Grace ; “ she raised my curiosity and then left it unsatisfied, saying you would come and tell me all.”

"I am glad she was obedient," returned Edward; I wanted to have the pleasure of telling you myself. How should you like to have me living at Lynton always?"

"O Edward!" The words said a great deal.

"Well, Dr. Conroy has made me an offer. Since Laurie went to the bank at Warminster, and he had to give up all hope of him taking to the profession, I think he has felt the want of some one to share the responsibilities of his work. Any way, he has asked me to become his partner, and I have accepted his offer, and am going to take "The Larches" after mid-summer. What do you say to it?"

"Say! why, that I am very, *very* glad," answered Grace.

"But, Grace, there is more to tell," he continued in a lower voice; "something of infinitely more importance as regards my happiness, something without which all this would be worthless. Grace, my house will need a——"

Surely never was interruption so inopportune.

At this moment a shadow fell on the casement, and through the half-opened window Major Bennett's voice was heard,

"I hope I am not interrupting you, Miss Grace, but my wife is in great trouble; her favourite canary is hanging suspended from his perch, and she can trust no one but you to extricate him from his perilous position."

Uttering a half-impatient exclamation under his breath, Edward rose to go, saying,

"I shall be in Lynbridge all day to-morrow, but I shall call in the evening as I come up from the station. Don't go to see my mother until you have heard all, Grace."

## CHAPTER VIII.

GRACE had grown very fond of their neighbours, the tall, rather blustering Major, and his little Frenchified wife, who only reached about to his elbow. They had no children, and, after twenty years of married life, were as devoted to each other as young lovers.

After knocking about for many years at different military stations all over the world, they had settled down at Lynton, and led the simple happy lives of a pair of children amongst their flowers and birds.

The roses were the Major's special hobby; a large aviary of canaries and other birds, Mrs. Bennet's.

Grace had often helped her to attend to them; and whenever any trouble befel them

and remedies had to be administered, or they caught their claws in their perch and had to be rescued, Mrs. Bennet, being incapable of doing anything but wringing her small white hands, and calling on "Darling Gus." for help, "Gus." invariably settled the matter by fetching Grace.

It was very hard, to-day, for her to listen with proper interest to the story of how the accident occurred, or to give her opinion on the rival merits of "*Maréchal Niel*" and "*La France*," although the Major gallantly fastened a lovely bud of each rose in her dress.

She did so long to get back and have a few minutes in her own room before her mother woke up; just a little quiet to collect her thoughts and realise the joy that had come into her life. For there could be no mistaking Edward's meaning, she thought, and she need no longer fear to acknowledge to herself that the sister love of childhood had grown into the

one passionate, changeless love of a true woman's heart.

When at length she was able to escape from her friends, she found her mother watching for her at their window.

"Did you know that Nellie had returned?" she asked.

"No! has she?" answered Grace.

"Yes! she called just before I got up. I was sorry I did not see her. I should have kept her until you came in. She told Mary she returned yesterday."

"Why, she must have returned the same day as Edward Somerville! I wonder if they came together; we were interrupted by Major Bennett or he might have told me. Mama! he is coming to live at Lynton, altogether, as partner to Dr. Conroy."

"Then that was the news Mrs. Somerville had for you?" said Mrs. Murray. "I am very glad for his mother's sake, it will be such a comfort to her to have him; there are few

such young men as Edward ; I knew Dr. Conroy thought most highly of him. I only wish Laurie had his stability of character."

Her mother's words were very sweet to Grace, though her sense of justice made her speak a word for her old play-fellow.

"Don't forget the difference in their age, Mama. I am sure there is good stuff in Laurie, if only it is brought out, so much will depend on the influences he is thrown amongst."

"Yes ! that is the difference between them ; Laurie will be moulded by the circumstances of his life, while Edward will mould circumstances to his will. But still I hope Laurie will do well ; he is a very lovable lad, and is sure to make friends."

That night Grace's care for her mother was even more tender and loving than usual, as if she would thus make up to her for the disloyalty of having admitted another love to share the innermost depths of the heart where

hitherto she had reigned alone. No love would ever separate her from her mother, nor did she for a moment fear that Edward would wish it to do so : still there would be a difference, a difference which she must let her feel as little as possible ; so she played her favourite pieces, soft, dreamy, German Lieder, with new feeling and expression, born of the new life that was dawning in her heart ; read her favourite book, and anticipated her every want with a watchfulness that was almost touching.

Life, the common every-day life, of every-day cares and every-day duties, often goes on with the same monotonous regularity, whether the heart be bubbling over with joy or torn with agony ; and the next day was much the same to Grace as any other, the same routine of work had to be gone through, but the light within was so reflected on her face that Maud exclaimed, "Miss Murray, I declare you look quite pretty to-day."

"Of course, she always looks pretty," retorted

Philip, indignant at the implied slight on his favourite's ordinary appearance.

Grace laughed, and checked the children. At least the plainness, which with her keen artistic sense of beauty she had sometimes regretted, had not prevented her winning the one heart she valued.

Was it mere chance that Grace's flowers required so much attention that evening, that daylight had faded into twilight, and still she lingered amongst them in the little garden?

Surely it was, for apparently she was too much absorbed in tying up a splendid spike of Roman hyacinths to hear the garden gate, and not till Edward Somerville was close by her side did she raise her eyes to greet him.

"Busy as usual, Grace," he said, as he took her hand. "Has Nellie been here to-day?"

"Nellie! no," she answered, looking up surprised; "she came yesterday when I was with Mrs. Bennett, but I did not see her."

"Then I shall be the first to tell my dear

little sister of my happiness after all. Grace, I was just saying, when we were interrupted, that The Larches would need a mistress, and Nellie has consented to be my wife."

How Grace blessed the gathering darkness which hid from his sight the white drawn face, which revealed only too plainly the chill that had fallen on her heart. Not yet could she command her voice sufficiently to speak; but Edward, full of his own happiness, did not notice her silence, and continued,

"I can hardly realise, even yet, how she, my bright, beautiful, winsome bird, can make up her mind to take a plain, grave, country doctor fifteen years older than herself. Of course she is far too good for me in every way, but at least it will be the one endeavour of my life to make her as happy as she has made me."

"Dear Edward, I do trust you will both be very happy." Grace's voice was quite steady as she said this.

"You see, Grace," he went on, "I saw how

beautiful and winning she was long ago, when I used to meet her here during my visits to my mother, but I always carefully avoided her. I felt I could not answer for myself if I saw too much of her, and I had no fancy for playing out the game of the moth and the candle ; but when I met her in London, at the Hartley's. Well ! There were always plans for going to this place and the other in which I was included, and when I saw that though she was surrounded by fashionable young men, all ready to do her bidding, and waiting on her smiles, she cared nothing for their flatteries, but turned to me, seeming to prefer my society to that of any of her more brilliant admirers, it was all over with me ; and to make a long story short, I told her how it was with me, and she consented to make me the happiest man in all England. Dr. Conroy is delighted, and most kind about it, but I fancy Mrs. Conroy thinks—very naturally—that she might have done better than marry a poor country doctor.”

"It is a great shame if she does," said Grace, making a strong effort to speak naturally. "Nellie could not possibly have done better."

Edward laughed; a pleased, happy laugh. "I knew you would speak a good word for me. You will go and see Nellie to-morrow, will you not? She thinks so much of you and your opinion, Grace. I believe she had got some ridiculous notion in her head that you would not approve of it. But you are shivering! I have no business keeping you out so late. Why, child, how cold you are!" he added, taking her hands. "Go in this minute, and get a hot drink, or I shall have you laid up with a cold, and it will be all my fault."

"Nay," said Grace, "I was beginning to feel cold when you came, and I have made my head ache stooping over the flowers."

Poor Grace! Do not judge her too hardly

for this departure from truth, the first of which she had ever in her life been guilty. But she felt that at all costs her secret must be guarded, and an excuse found for the changed looks of which she was only too conscious.

"Then I must not keep you another moment. Go in, and tell Mrs. Murray that as your doctor I order you off to bed."

Mrs. Murray was up-stairs that day; and as Grace, in obedience to Edward's injunction, went indoors, she debated with herself whether she should tell her mother the news that had fallen on her as such a crushing blow.

It must be told, and her first impulse was to get it over as soon as possible. But a moment's reflection told her that, in that case, her mother would hardly fail to connect with it her altered looks, and the headache which was now no false plea.

No! as she did not know of Edward's visit,

it would be quite soon enough to tell her after she had seen Nellie. She would be compelled to call on her on the morrow. The news would then seem to come from her, and no suspicion would be aroused. All this passed through Grace's mind in less time than it has taken to write it.

She went into her mother's room, where the lamp was not yet lighted, and placing herself in her favourite position at Mrs. Murray's feet, she laid her head down, saying, "If it were not for leaving you so long alone, Mamsie, I should go straight off to bed, I have given myself such a frightful headache with stooping, tying up my flowers."

"Then you must go at once; Mary can see to all my wants. She has not to go out, has she? Poor child, how cold you are. How could you be so foolish as to stay out so late?" said Mrs. Murray, troubled and anxious. "Let me ring for Mary to get you something."

"No, no! I shall be all right soon; don't

be anxious, darling ; but if you can do without me, I really will go to bed."

And Grace rose to go, conscious of only one longing, the desire to be alone, to hide herself and her shame from all eyes; for there was, to her, the bitterest shame, the most painful humiliation, in the thought that she had so deceived herself and given her love unsought.

Alone, through the long weary night, she battled with an agony that well-nigh overwhelmed her; but by degrees she grew calmer. Like most deep, earnest natures, she was very undemonstrative; but she knew well to whom to turn in her hour of need, and though no words came, no petition was offered, He who has promised "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee," heard the voiceless cry that went up to Him, and sent healing balm to the poor wrung heart.

"Perfect through suffering." Those were

the words that came with a message of comfort to her heart; like the sound of far-off music they rang in her ears, coming she knew not whence.

Could it be that, after all, God was not spoiling her life, making it a poor worthless thing fit only to be cast away, but perfecting it as the Master's had been perfected, fitting it for His service?

Not yet was she ready to take in the full comfort of that thought; but it came, as it were a faint gleam of light through the black darkness.

Then, too, none guessed her secret, and with the whole force of her character, the whole energy of her will, she determined to guard it. No one should point at her the finger of scornful pity, or deem her unmaidenly and bold.

As she looked back, she freely exonerated Edward from all blame, and she felt that the pain would have been infinitely greater if he had

proved himself in any way unworthy of her love. It was some comfort to feel that she might still look up to him, as she had done from childhood, as the noblest and truest of men.

It had all been a cruel mistake ; a mistake fraught with keenest pain to her, but for which no one could be blamed but herself, unless, indeed, it were Nellie, for those careless jesting words, spoken long ago, which first disturbed the happy unconsciousness of their intercourse.

The first faint tinge of morning light was beginning to appear, and still Grace had never been in bed. Now, however, after throwing herself on her knees, with an earnest prayer for guidance and strength, she bathed her face, undressed ; then, after unlocking her door, lay down, and contrary to her expectation was soon fast asleep.

She was aroused by Mary Hobbs, who was standing at her bedside with a breakfast-tray.

"I was obliged to waken you, Miss Grace," she said, "for it is nearly time for you to go. But mistress says if your head is not quite better she will send a note to Mrs. Heathcote; and I'm sure she had better do so, for you don't look fit for bothering with those children."

"Nonsense!" cried Grace, springing up in dismay, "I never knew such a thing for me to sleep in this way, but I did not go to sleep for a long time. Breakfast in bed too! Well, I suppose I must have it now you have brought it; but why didn't you awaken me, Mary?"

"Nay, my lamb, I couldn't find in my heart; I came in twice, but you were sleeping so peaceful; it went sore against the grain to awaken you when I did."

We are apt to sympathise with people who have a daily routine task which must be done alike in joy or sorrow; yet it is questionable whether it is not often a blessing in disguise, for work, if it be not a remedy for sorrow, is at

least an anodyne, serving to lull the pain; and it was far better for Grace to have to go to her daily work, correcting German exercises, drilling the mysteries of fractions and proportion into dull heads, and persuading awkward little fingers to run smoothly along the scales, than it would have been to have had leisure to sit at home and brood over her sorrow.

Directly after dinner she prepared to go to Dr. Conroy's.

"Had you not better stay in and rest, Grace?" said her mother anxiously; "I am sure you were far from well last night."

"I must go, dear mother, Nellie will think it so unkind if I do not; besides, I am really better except for a slight headache; I can rest all the evening, and you shall coddle me up to your heart's content."

Grace dreaded the interview exceedingly, but it was her nature to face her difficulties at once; besides, she was afraid of Nellie calling, and

it coming out that she already knew of the engagement.

Nellie was seated at the window as Grace approached, and came to meet her at the door. Very lovely she looked, her soft grey cashmere dress, made in the latest Parisian style, setting off to the best advantage her graceful figure.

Grace, as she looked at her, scarcely wondered at Edward.

"Dear Nellie," she said, kissing her, "I do indeed congratulate you, and wish you every happiness."

Nellie looked at her half curiously. "Do you?" she said. "Well, I am very glad, you dear old girl. I was half disposed to think you would not consider me good enough for your paragon; but Edward told me this morning you were pleased. Were you surprised?"

By this time they had reached the drawing-room, and drawing her to a couch, Nellie seated herself by her side, with her arm round her in

girlish fashion. "Very much," replied Grace, to her question.

"To tell the truth, so am I; it is a clear case of 'the biter bit.' I hadn't the faintest intention of falling in love with him, though I was fully determined he should fall in love with me. You know long ago he used to provoke me with his cool indifference. He seemed so altogether different from other men, I felt a word of praise from him was worth a score of ordinary compliments and fine speeches; and when at last I succeeded in bringing him to my feet I was half frightened at my success; he was so desperately in earnest, and I found that my own heart was lost in the process. Yes! I have a heart, Miss Grace; though you haven't given me credit for it, I believe."

"Nay, Nellie, that is not true. I only thought you too careless about wounding the hearts of others," said Grace.

"Oh, you needn't disclaim; I wasn't quite sure of the fact myself until last week, when

it stood greatly in my own light. Do you know, Grace, Mama is terribly provoked with me. There was a most eligible young baronet who was invited for my especial benefit. He had a long rent-roll, a handsome face, and an empty head, and was as greatly smitten as any one could wish. I believe Ethel sent Mama glowing accounts of how matters were progressing, when all was spoiled by Edward proposing ; and I—well I felt that he was worth all the rest put together, and that my newly-discovered heart would not let me say ‘No’ for all the titles and riches in the world.”

“And you have chosen wisely, dear.”

“So Papa thinks. Do you know I really believed at one time he was thinking of you, he was with you so constantly last time he was at Lynton. I told him so.”

“O Nellie, you never did !” cried Grace in great distress.

“I did, and he was nearly as angry with me as you are. He said you had been just

like his sister ever since you were a child, and he valued your friendship so highly that he should be deeply grieved if anything were said to spoil its freedom and unconsciousness. And then he made such a pretty speech about the man who had the happiness to win such a priceless treasure as your true heart, that I was half-inclined to be jealous."

Grace needed all her self-control to answer this speech quietly ; but Nellie ran on, scarcely waiting for her to speak.

"Laurie was here yesterday, and Papa has been in the dumps ever since. I believe he was wanting money again. I asked him, but he would hardly speak to me."

"I am very sorry," said Grace, who had a sincere regard for the bright-eyed handsome lad, who had been so early thrown amongst the temptations of a large town, and was so little fitted to withstand them.

After a little more talk on indifferent subjects, Grace left, feeling that part of her trial

was over. There was but another ordeal to go through—the first talk with Mrs. Somerville on the subject,—and then she would be safe. None would suspect her secret, and she could live out the life that had become so grey and colourless; live it, and strive to make it at least true and useful.

It was characteristic of the girl that she went at once, on her way home, to Mrs. Somerville's.

She found her in the same pleasant room where we first made her acquaintance. Neither the room nor its occupant were much changed since then, only the gentle face was a little thinner, the white hair more snowy, the step more feeble, but the bond of sympathy between the two had only strengthened with the flight of years.

"I hope my boy will be happy," said the elder lady, smoothing the brown hair caressingly as of old; "it will, as you say, be very good to have him so near me in my old age," for Grace

had spoken of her pleasure that it should be so, "but his choice is not the one I should have made for him," and Grace fancied her hand lingered regretfully on her head.

"I suppose it is natural for mothers to think no one good enough for their sons, and I would not, for worlds, damp his happiness with my fears that it may not last, that Nellie is too shallow, and too selfish really to make him happy, but you and I have no secrets from each other, little one."

"Dear Mrs. Somerville," returned Grace earnestly, "I believe you will like Nellie better when you know her; she is very winning, and she loves Edward so very much."

"And that fact will make up for a great deal in my eyes and yours, Grace," said Mrs. Somerville, smiling. "What! must you go? let me look at you, child. Edward said you were beginning of a bad cold; you do not look well!"

"I am better. I have only a slight head-

ache," said Grace, longing to escape the loving but scrutinising gaze of her friend. "I must hasten home, for I have been out all day," and she suited the action to the word.

Mrs. Somerville watched her down the road, then turned from the window saying to herself with a sigh, "I trust it is not as I feared. I could hardly have forgiven Edward if he had spoiled that child's life. But how could he pass her by for a girl like Nellie?"

That evening Grace submitted to lie on the sofa and be petted and waited on by her mother and Mary, who were still concerned at her pale face, and the headache which she did not think it necessary to conceal, as they could not connect it with news which they supposed she had heard for the first time that afternoon.

It was very soothing to the poor weary child to rest thus, pillowled as it were in the arms of that mother's love, which is, after all, the purest, tenderest, most unselfish feeling that is to be found on this earth of ours.

And when next day she again took up life's  
burdens, though for her

“The little village looks forlorn,  
She sighs amid her narrow days,  
Moving about her household ways,”

that love was like a bright star, shining steadfastly down upon her, and cheering her pathway.

## CHAPTER IX.

LIFE had gone on, as far as outward things were concerned, much as usual for about three weeks, when one Friday morning Grace came in from her work with a brighter face than usual.

"Ma-mie, what will you say to having me at home for a whole fortnight's holiday?" she exclaimed, on entering Mrs. Murray's room.

"Holiday! How is that, Grace?" questioned her mother.

"Why, Mrs. Heathcote has taken it into her head that 'dear Phil' is looking very pale, and must have a blow from the sea-breezes at once, so they go on Monday to Harford. She invited me to accompany them, but I declined, and said they could have a fortnight less holiday at Mid-summer to make up for this interruption."

"It was kind of her to ask you. Are you sure that the change and sea air would not do you good? You have not looked well lately, Grace," said Mrs. Murray, looking anxiously at her daughter.

"My dear mother, you surely do not seriously suppose that a whole fortnight of Mrs. Heathcote's society, shut up in lodgings with her too, could possibly be beneficial to any one's health. We are the best possible friends at a distance; she does not enter the schoolroom once a week, but if we came into closer contact I would not answer for the consequences. Besides, I have plans of my own which this holiday will give me a nice opportunity to carry out."

"And what are they?"

"Don't be inquisitive, little mother, I can't tell you all at once. In the first place, I met Mr. Wilson on my way, and told him you would be alone on Monday afternoon, as I was going to Warminster, and I should be very glad if he would come and have tea with you."

"Going to Warminster, Grace! Whatever for?" asked Mrs. Murray, greatly astonished.

Grace laid her hands fondly on her mother's thin white ones, and said, "Dear Mama, all joking apart, I want you to trust me for a little while; you know I am old enough to take care of myself; you are not afraid I shall get into mischief. Will you promise not to ask any question until I get back, then I will tell you all?"

Mrs. Murray, somewhat mystified, gave the required promise, and nothing more was said of the proposed journey.

We must, however, take leave to watch Grace's proceedings a little more closely than her mother did.

Early on Monday morning she opened her portfolio, and selected six of her best drawings. Evidently the choice gave her some trouble, for she changed them several times; she then made them up carefully into a brown paper parcel, which she gave to a child with directions to

leave it at the station. Thither she soon followed, and depositing it and herself in the corner of an empty second-class carriage, was soon whirling rapidly on her way to Warminster, the nearest large centre of population to their little village.

Grace had only been there a few times, during her father's lifetime, but it was quite clear, by the manner in which she made her way through the busy throng of people, that she both knew where she was going, and what she was going for. She slackened her pace opposite one of those large picture-shops, the windows of which are always crowded with gazers, from the little street-boy with an incipient taste for art, to the city merchant who cannot quite make up his mind to give 'three hundred' for the landscape which he looks at every day in passing, and will certainly end by purchasing.

Was Grace waiting her turn to look in? It seemed not, though she lingered and hesitated. At last, after walking backwards and forwards

twice, she seemed to gather herself together with fresh determination, pushed open the heavy plate-glass door and entered.

A smiling young shopman came forward, of whom she inquired, "Can I see Mr. Dominic?"

"He is not in at present. Can I do anything for you, miss?"

"No, thank you; if Mr. Dominic is likely to be in soon, I will wait."

The young man handed her a seat, and retired to his own corner, from whence he cast sundry furtive glances at the small black draped figure, of which, as he admitted to himself, he could not quite take the measure.

Grace had not long to wait before the door opened, and Mr. Dominic entered. He was rather a short thin man, with long grey beard, hooked nose, and keen brown eyes.

The young man at once rose, and said—

"This young lady is waiting to speak to you, sir."

"Ha!" he said, turning round with a sharpness that nearly dissipated all the courage poor Grace had mustered up.

"I wanted to ask if you ever bought water-colour drawings, and if you would look at these?" she said, holding out the precious parcel.

"Never buy the works of unknown artists. In these days of chromos and oleographs, amateur daubs are a complete drug in the market. Stay!" he continued, his tone softening a little, as Grace with quivering lips was turning to depart, "I will look at yours if you like."

She silently handed him the parcel, and watched him untie the knots and take out the drawings, scanning them over, one by one, from every point of view, with that slow deliberation which is such torture to the unfortunate artist whose works are being inspected. Grace, however, saw his face relax as he looked, and when he turned and said, "Well! what sort of an opinion do you want?" she managed to answer

with a firmer voice than before, "A true and honest one of course!"

"That's right, that's right," he said approvingly, again holding out one of the drawings at arm's length. "There is no sense in flattery, but I tell you candidly that these drawings are very much above the average of what are brought to us; there is real artistic feeling in them, and they are very true to nature, but there is a crudeness and want of technical knowledge about some of them that is more your master's fault than your own. See! the colouring in this group of chrysanthemums is excellent, especially on this side, but the effect of the picture is spoiled by the arrangement of the stems. From whom have you learned?"

"From no one," Grace answered; "I learned drawing as a child from my governess, but I have had no other instruction."

Mr. Dominic looked at the drawings with increased interest, and said cordially,

"Then you have done very well indeed; and my advice to you is that you put yourself at once under good training, and we shall hear more of you. If you like to get some of these things framed, and send them to local exhibitions, they may possibly get hung and sold, but I should not trouble about it till you have done something better worth notice. Believe me, there is no royal road to Art any more than to anything else. All must go along the same path of hard work, properly directed. The only difference is that where there is genius or talent it is a pleasant road; where there is not, it is very dull and dreary. But the greatest genius in the whole world never did anything worth doing without hard work."

"There is a School of Art here, is there not?" asked Grace.

"Yes, and you could not do better than join the classes. The work there is very thorough."

"I do not live here," replied Grace, "but I should like to make some enquiries, if you will kindly tell me the name of the head master, and direct me to it. I am much obliged to you," she added.

"Nay; you are very welcome to my advice, that is cheap enough," said Mr. Dominic, with a laugh, for he was now quite thawed and interested. "I hope I shall see some more of your work when you are no longer an unknown artist. The master's name is Mr. Lydgate; you will find him there to-day, and if you do not know the town I would advise you to get into the omnibus that is just coming up, and tell them to set you down at the corner of Church Street, then turn to your left, and in five minutes you will be at the place."

He went out to hail the 'bus and hand her parcel in, and soon Grace was rattling along through the busy streets, too absorbed in her

own reflections to notice much of what was passing.

"Church Street! Lady inside for Church Street?" sang out the conductor, and Grace hastily dismounted, and turned as directed to the left.

The School of Art was a handsome building, and the broad flight of steps which led up to the principal entrance looked very imposing. But Grace was so much encouraged by the success of her first venture that she ascended them with far less trepidation than she had felt on opening Mr. Dominic's glass-door. A hall-porter in livery sat at a table in the entrance, and, in reply to her enquiry for Mr. Lydgate, bade her knock at a door which he pointed out.

A pleasant voice answered "Come in" to her timid knock, and opening the door Grace found herself in the presence of a tall, middle-aged man, so unmistakably a gentleman, both in

manner and feeling, that she felt at ease with him at once.

He greeted her courteously, and handed her a seat.

"You wished to see me about joining the classes?" he said questioningly.

And then Grace told him of her longing to study art as a profession, and asked him to tell her candidly, as far as he could from the drawings she had brought, what would be her prospect of success. "I know these are very faulty," she said, "but I have had no instructor. I only want to know if there is any promise in them of better things."

"And if I find there is," he said, taking the parcel from her hands, "what do you propose to do? Do you live in Warminster?"

"No!" said Grace; "there is my difficulty. I live at Lynton with my mother, who is a widow, and I am earning forty pounds a-year as a morning governess. I cannot afford to give up a certainty for an uncertainty, but

I thought, if you considered my drawings showed sufficient promise to justify me in hoping for success in art, I would try to get a similar situation here and devote the afternoons to drawing."

By this time Mr. Lydgate had opened the parcel, and was looking at the drawings with evident surprise and pleasure.

"You have had no teacher, you say; how long have you worked alone?" he asked.

"I cannot remember the time when drawing was not my greatest pleasure," she replied; "but it is only since my father's death, a year and a half ago, that I have worked with a definite aim in view."

"Well," said Mr. Lydgate cordially, "I am not afraid to promise you a very large measure of success: as you say, some of these drawings are faulty, but they show a power and originality, an artistic feeling and love of nature, which, rightly directed, will do great things. By all means you must embrace art as a profession.

But," he added, passing his hand meditatively through the thick brown hair, which was just beginning to be sprinkled with grey, "we must think of something better for you than going on with teaching at the same time."

"I shall not mind that at all," Grace began, tears of joy and pleasure at such unexpected praise very near her eyes.

"No, no, if there were nothing better to be done; but many students at the School of Art find employment at the china works in the town, and I think after about a fortnight's instruction in the use of the colours, and the different style of painting required, you would be quite competent to undertake work. It would be given you to do at your own home, and as you could design as well as execute, you might earn considerably more than the sum you mention. Would that suit you?"

"It would, indeed," answered Grace, gratefully.

"There is nothing like going on sure

ground, so when you get home, send me a few specimens of your sketches of flowers and other things; my brother-in-law, Mr. Forster, is at the head of one of the largest china works in the town; I will lay them before him, and let you know whether he can guarantee you employment. You will give me your address!"

Grace wrote it down for him, and, as he read it, he looked at her again with increased interest, for the story of Mr. Murray's death and the way in which Mrs. Murray had acted had reached as far as Warminster.

"Miss Murray!" he said, "your name is very well known to me. And now, are you alone? have you friends in the town? Because, if not you must let me take you across to my wife; she will be delighted to make your acquaintance, and give you a cup of tea before you return."

"Thank you," said Grace, "but I shall only just have time to catch the train, and my

mother will be anxious if I do not return at the time I fixed."

"Is it the five o'clock train?" said Mr. Lydgate, pulling out his watch; "I must get you a cab, or you will not do as it is. Miles," he said, opening the door and rousing the sleepy porter, "run round the corner and bring a cab as quickly as you can."

"How can I ever thank you for your kindness!" said Grace; "I can never repay it."

"You can very easily," said Mr. Lydgate, with a kind smile, "only get on, and fulfil the promise you now give; nothing pleases me better than to have to be proud of my pupils. But here comes the cab; you will just be in time," and shaking hands he opened the cab-door for her, bade the cabman drive to White Hill Station, S.W. platform, and stood for a moment watching the cab-drive off.

"That girl will do something," he said to himself as he turned and slowly reascended the

steps ; "to think of her being poor Murray's daughter. I did not tell her that Forster was one of the creditors ; the fact will make him more ready to help her ; though, as far as I can see, he may be very glad to employ her independently of anything. She is clearly a true artist ; it will be a pleasure to have her for a pupil."

Meanwhile Grace pursued her homeward way, almost bewildered by her own success. She had long wished to make the change, but it was the events of the last few weeks that had driven her to take the decisive step. While her heart had been at peace, and the sunshine of hope had streamed on her way, the monotony of her life and of her work had not tried her. The quiet days had slipped happily and peacefully by. Now, it seemed to grind her down as with a millstone. The sky was dull and leaden ; the way a flat, dreary plain. She felt that health and spirits would not long stand the strain laid upon them. She must escape, somehow, some-

where, and climb upwards to a higher level, a wider life.

If the sunny sheltered home in the valley were not for her, she must at least press onward and upward, and in the wide expanse, the glorious view of the lonely mountain heights, satisfy the ever-widening, ever-deepening aspirations of her soul.

She had not told her mother the purpose of her expedition, for, always thoughtful for her, she determined that, if it failed, she should never know of her own unsatisfied longings. Even now she would ascertain whether the change would be painful to her before she let her know how greatly her heart was set on it. The way was unexpectedly opened for her. When she reached home, she found Mr. Wilson still seated with her mother.

"Why, Grace, you look quite bright and blooming," was her old friend's greeting. "Your mother and I might have spared our lamentations over your pale cheeks. Yet I think," he

continued, turning to Mrs. Murray, "it proves that I am right."

"I should very much like to know what treason you two have been talking about me behind my back," said Grace playfully, as she laid aside her outer dress, and sat down at once to the tea which Mary hastened to set before her.

"Mr. Wilson has noticed that you have looked pale and dull of late," said her mother; "he thinks your work at Mrs. Heathcote's tries you far more than you will let us know, and that we ought to make an effort to make some change."

"Yes," rejoined Mr. Wilson, "and the fact that a few days' holiday and this little trip to Warminster should make such an alteration in your looks, proves that I am right, Grace. The life is too monotonous for you, child."

"Mr. Wilson," said Grace, with mock solemnity, though secretly delighted at the turn things were taking, "I shall never be able to

trust you again as long as I live. To think of you taking advantage of my absence to come and fill my mother's head with foolish fancies. It is not what I expected of you. But, mother darling," she continued, taking her usual seat by her side, "seriously, would it be a great trial to you to leave Lynton ? "

"Not if it would be for your good, my child. You are all that is left to me, and if you are well and happy it is all I care for. But, dear," Mrs. Murray asked somewhat anxiously, "what do you mean ? What could you do in a strange place ? "

And then Grace told to her two sympathising listeners the whole story of her journey, its object, and its success. Mr. Wilson could hardly restrain his delight, as Grace told, though very modestly, of the praise bestowed on her work ; while Mrs. Murray's eyes filled with tears of pleasure, and both warmly approved of her plan.

"Here were we," said Mr. Wilson, rubbing

his hands, "thinking of all sorts of impossible things for her, and the child has quietly settled the business herself without any help of ours. Ah! these young people get on sadly too fast for us now-a-days. I am almost forgetting, in my pleasure, all it will cost me," he added. "I shall miss you both sadly, Grace; but the change is so clearly for your advantage, that I must give you up ungrudgingly."

A little more talk followed as to ways and means. Of course nothing could be done without giving Mrs. Heathcote proper notice, but it was agreed that, if Mr. Forster's reply proved satisfactory, Grace should give her notice to leave at midsummer, and Mr. Wilson promised to accompany her on a house-hunting expedition to Warminster: an old friend of his, Mr. Maurice, the rector of a poor, densely-peopled parish in the town, would, Mr. Wilson said, give them every assistance in their search.

The next day Grace despatched her sketches to Mr. Lydgate, and waited impatiently for the

answer. It seemed long in coming, but, when at last it arrived, it was eminently satisfactory.

"Mr. Forster was much pleased with the sketches," Mr. Lydgate said, "and would engage to give Miss Murray regular employment; the remuneration would, of course, depend on the quantity and quality of the work done, but it would certainly more than compensate for the situation she was giving up. For his own part, he considered the sketches gave more decided proof of talent than the finished pictures she had brought him."

## CHAPTER X.

GRACE MURRAY had not at all realised what a wrench it would be to leave the little village where she had passed her whole life. They had always kept so much aloof from general society, and Grace had been so shy and reserved, that she was quite taken by surprise to find how many friends she had made, and how much regret was felt at their departure.

In towns, people may come and go unnoticed and uncared for, but in villages, society is united together by a much closer bond; and no one who had lived so kindly and unselfish a life amongst them as the Murrays had, could fail to be greatly missed.

Mrs. Heathcote was much aggrieved, and

somewhat indignant, being utterly unable to rise above her own selfish considerations.

Grace had answered her purpose admirably as a governess, she would never be able to fill her place, and it was hard to be deprived of her services just as the children were beginning really to profit by them. That was the only side of the case she could see ; and she contrived to make Grace's life thoroughly uncomfortable by the inuendoes she constantly threw out, about the ingratitude of human nature, and the selfishness of people accepting kindness for their own ends, and then repudiating it.

Nellie, too, declared it was too bad of Grace, she did not know when she should forgive her ; she certainly should not do so unless she promised to come over to be her bride's-maid. To Edward, it was a real disappointment that Grace should be leaving Lynton just as he was coming to live there ; but both he and his mother fully entered into her feelings—or, at least, supposed they did—and rejoiced at the prospect that was

opening out for her of following up her favourite pursuit.

Still, altogether, it was an unsettled, uncomfortable time, and Grace was thankful when the decisive step was fairly taken, and, all the miseries of removing safely over, she and her mother could sit down for their first evening at No. 2 Stanley Terrace ; the home which she and Mr. Wilson had selected, chiefly on account of its proximity to the School of Art, where Grace would attend daily.

It was rather larger than the cottage at Lynton, having two sitting-rooms, one of which was fitted up as a studio, and there was a pleasant little garden at the back ; for the rest, it was one of those commonplace houses, of which it may be said—as of commonplace people—there are so many cast in precisely the same mould, that it needs a close acquaintance to distinguish between them, and appreciate the individuality, which both, undoubtedly, possess, in a greater or less degree.

When she had seen Mrs. Murray safely in bed, Grace retired to her own room, and, leaning on the window-sill, gazing out into the clear starlit summer sky, its peaceful influences soothing her troubled spirit, and bringing a restful calm, she ventured, for the first time, to review past, present, and future.

Another page of her life's story was closed ; a page on which had fallen so dark a cloud of sorrow that she was glad to turn it over. She knew that if she had remained at Lynton, in constant intercourse with Edward and Nellie, the wound would have remained ever open, festering in her heart, and she had no intention that it should do so. Her nature was too true and healthy to encourage any sickly sentimentality about blighted hopes and a spoiled life.

She knew that God never spoils our lives ; they can only be spoiled by our own sin, or the sin of others. She had poured out the wealth of her love unsought, unheeded, but not on an unworthy object ; to have done that would have

been the keenest agony of all to Grace. But Edward had done her no wrong; he had not intentionally gained her love—nay, he guessed not that it was his; and he was as worthy of her esteem as she had ever believed him; therefore, though she felt that hers must be a lonely lot, that the joys of domestic happiness, the crown of woman's life, the love of husband and of child, must be amongst the “might have beens” of life for her, she could face her position without any bitterness in her heart; rather were the poet's words fulfilled in her—

“Talk not of wasted affection—affection never is wasted;  
If it enrich not the heart of another, its waters returning  
Back to their springs like the rain, shall fill them full of  
refreshment;  
That which the fountain sends forth returns again to the  
fountain.”

She would live, she thought, for her mother, and for art; but, though she knew it not, her life was being enriched, her sympathies widened, and she was being fitted for that life of self-sacrifice and service for others, which is the noblest and most blessed of all lives.

Grace soon found that, delightful and absorbing as her work was, it was still real work. There was so much for her to learn; perspective, anatomical drawing, drawing from casts and models, all this was entirely new to her; it was like laying the foundations after the superstructure had been partially erected; but her love for art was too genuine for her to complain of any drudgery that was needful to make her a true artist, one in whom native talent was perfected by acquired knowledge. Mr. Lydgate proved a most kind and encouraging teacher and friend, and his bright, pleasant little wife was their first visitor in their new home.

Another visitor they had, shortly, in Mr. Maurice. Grace had sought out his dingy, smoke-begrimed church in the heart of the town, attracted thither, in the first instance, by the fact that he was Mr. Wilson's friend, but afterwards drawn irresistibly by the wonderful power of his preaching.

He preached to poor men and women, toilers

and strugglers along the weary ways of life, waifs and outcasts too—for he, literally, went out into the highways and hedges to compel them to come in—speaking to them in homely language, but with an eloquence born of intense conviction and deep earnestness; pouring out truths that he felt in his inmost soul; telling of a Friend for the Friendless, of rest for the weary, of pardon and home for the outcast and the prodigal, in a way that arrested the attention of the most careless, and compelled men to listen.

Such preaching was like a new revelation to Grace, and she was never willingly absent from his services.

He now came seeking to enlist her in his band of workers, and also to make acquaintance with Mrs. Murray, whom Mr. Wilson had recommended to his care.

Mr. Maurice was a tall, intellectual-looking man, with a pale, grave, face. He had come there, ten years ago, a young man full of life

and energy, bringing with him a young wife to share his labours, and two fair children to brighten the gloomy rectory, which became, thenceforward, a centre of life, light, and activity to the whole parish. Scarcely could a brighter happier home have been imagined, until one fatal summer, when an epidemic broke out amidst the densely-populated streets and courts of the town.

Edward Maurice was not one to desert his post at such a time, nor would his wife leave him. He went in and out amongst his people, ministering to the sick and dying with untiring devotion. He took all possible precautions against conveying the infection to his home, and all went well, till the epidemic seemed to be dying away and all danger past. Then the terrible scourge, making, as it seemed, a last effort at destruction, entered that happy home, and in one short week carried away wife and children, and left him, crushed to the very ground by the blow.

Slowly, after many months, he came back to life and work. His friends urged him to leave a place associated with so much sorrow, but he would not do so. He would work on amongst his people, devoting himself heart and soul to his Master's service. Strangers sometimes complained of his silence and absence of mind ; but no mourner ever went to him in sorrow, no penitent with confession of wrong and earnest repentance, who did not testify to having received a fulness and depth of sympathy far beyond anything they could have hoped for, while the fact that his church was filled to overflowing with a class of people who, as a rule, are conspicuous for their absence from religious services, proved unmistakably the hold he had gained on the hearts of the people.

This, then, was the man under whose direction Grace first began to work amongst the poor ; for she very gladly undertook a district, and though altogether inexperienced, the ready

tact and quick sympathy which had distinguished her, even as a child, soon won for her a welcome ; while the warm interest she took in the people whom she visited was very good for her, preventing her becoming too much absorbed in her studies, and cultivating her intellect at the expense of her heart.

The only other friend they had in the town was an old one, Laurie Conroy. Before they left Lynton, Dr. Conroy had said to Mrs. Murray, " If you can hold out a friendly hand, now and then, to that boy of mine, I shall be grateful : it will do him good to feel he has a friend in the town. I sometimes fear I made a mistake in sending him. But there ! I was cast on the world to sink or swim long before I was his age !" and with this reflection the good doctor tried to dismiss the subject.

In compliance with this request, Mrs. Murray had asked Laurie to come to them on Saturday afternoons as often as he could ; and for a time he seemed to appreciate the invitation, coming

frequently, and getting Grace to play for him, to accompany his songs, or sometimes to take a long country walk with him. But by degrees other attractions prevailed, and by the time six months had passed they rarely saw him.

Time sped rapidly with the little household at Stanley Terrace. It is wonderful what one busy, energetic spirit can do in infusing life and brightness into a household. Mrs. Murray in her quiet room, and Mary Hobbs in her kitchen, both felt they had a part in Grace's work. She never finished anything that they had not both to inspect and admire. Both exulted in the praise Mr. Forster bestowed, in no measured terms, on her work for him, which was reported to them by his sister, Mrs. Lydgate; and when Grace brought word that Mr. Lydgate wanted her to go in for an art scholarship of fifty pounds a year, and held out great hopes of success, it was quite a gala-day for all. Then, too, in her district work. They knew and were interested in all the people; and many

warm garments made by Mrs. Murray's hands for the poor old women, many strengthening dishes for the sick and weak made by Mary, found their way into those gloomy courts, rays from the sun of human love and kindness that, like mercy, are "twice blessed," blessing alike "him that gives and him that takes."

## CHAPTER XI.

THE stream of life was flowing on at quiet little Lynton, as at busy Warminster. Nellie and Edward were married, and had just returned from their wedding tour to settle down at The Larches; but still Grace had never revisited her old home. She corresponded constantly with Mrs. Somerville and Mr. Wilson, and more occasionally with Nellie, but there had never seemed to come the convenient season for visiting them. Her absence from the wedding was fully excused by the illness of Mrs. Murray, who happened to be so much worse at that time that Grace had to send for Dr. Conroy to see her, as well as the Warminster doctor whom she had called in, and both quite

agreed with her that it was impossible for her to leave home.

But now Nellie wrote, saying she must have Grace, at the very least, to spend a long day with her before the summer was over; and Grace herself felt it was better not to put it off any longer.

So, after over a year's absence, she found herself again in the old familiar place. Edward and Nellie met her at the station with their pony carriage, but, at her earnest request, left her for an hour at Mrs. Somerville's before proceeding to their home.

"Mind you do not stay one moment longer," cried Nellie, with a pretty imperious gesture, as they drove away leaving her standing at the little garden gate.

So far, all had seemed strangely unfamiliar; but now, clasped once more in her friend's loving arms, the past year vanished like a dream, and she was again the Grace Murray

of old days, who had spent many of her happiest hours in that quiet room.

They did not talk very much; true friends meeting after a long separation seldom can do, and there is a silence that is more expressive than speech. But the time sped swiftly by, and Grace, looking up at the timepiece, saw with dismay that she had exceeded her time more than half an hour.

"Oh, dear!" she said, "what shall I do? I fully intended giving myself time to call at Mr. Wilson's on the way."

"You can call this afternoon. He has seen you so often, that I think I deserve the largest share of you to-day," said Mrs. Somerville, her arm still round the girl (for Mr. Wilson had been a frequent visitor at Warminster during the year). "But I must let you go; it has been very good to have this peep at you, my child. I shall be better satisfied now, for I see your work is doing you no harm; you have quite lost the fagged look you were getting at Mrs.

Heathcote's." And, with one last kiss, Grace tore herself unwillingly away.

She found Nellie awaiting her somewhat impatiently. Edward had been unexpectedly called from home. "A horrid, tiresome, old woman, five miles away, has taken it into her head to fancy she is very ill to-day, and sent a man on horseback over for Edward. I don't suppose there is much the matter with her! but that's the worst of a doctor's life, they have to be at everybody's beck and call. It is very provoking. Edward is so disappointed, he had arranged his work to have a long afternoon with us. But come, you must take your things off, and then look at my house," and drawing Grace's arm through hers, she led her upstairs, and then showed her through the handsomely appointed house, with a little affectation of matronly pride that was very becoming.

"Edward is so good. Mamma says he spoils me with letting me have all I want: he thought we should do with two servants to begin with,

but I persuaded him to let me have three, and put the boy who attends to the pony in livery, so that he can wait at table occasionally. We had a dinner-party last week; the Allingtons, Grenvilles, and all the people who are worth visiting. You know Edward hates company of that sort, but they had all received us so well: and, as I tell him, there are certain duties we owe to society that should not be neglected."

Grace smiled at this speech.

"Now what are you laughing at me for, Grace?" said Nellie, with a little pout: "I have heard mamma say that many a time."

Grace now laughed outright. "That was exactly what I was smiling at," she said; "I felt so sure that last sentiment was not original; it did not seem to fit your mouth, and you see I was right."

Nellie joined in the laugh at her own expense, saying, "I see you are as provoking as ever, but now I am a married woman you will surely credit me with a little wisdom of my own."

All the young bride's new possessions were duly inspected and admired, though Grace could not help wondering a little, in secret, at the costliness of her surroundings, which seemed hardly in keeping with her position as a country doctor's wife, and hoping that Edward's love and indulgence of his beautiful wife would not lead him into imprudence.

After dinner, the time passed quickly in going to see old friends. The Bennetts, her old pupils the Heathcotes, Mrs. Hollis at the farm, and their old gardener Thomas, with his wife Nancy Heath at White's Row, none were forgotten; and it was not until she was standing on the platform with Nellie, ready to start for home, that Edward drove hurriedly up.

"Just in time for a last word, Grace," he said, as he jumped out of the carriage; "I cannot tell you how disappointed I am to have missed you, but poor Mrs. Joyce was so ill I could not leave her sooner; but you will come again before long, I hope."

The train whizzed out of the station as he spoke, saving Grace from the necessity of replying.

"It is good to be at home, Mamsie," she said that night, leaning her tired head against her mother; "it was very pleasant to see them all, but this dingy old town seems more home-like now: I do not feel that I could go back to the old life there."

"Then you are content here, my darling?" asked Mrs. Murray.

"Quite content, my mother," was the girl's answer; and it was a true one.

## CHAPTER XII.

AUTUMN was again passing into winter. Though it was only the end of October, a keen frost had set in, and snow was falling in thick flakes on the almost deserted pavement of the streets of Warminster, for it was about ten o'clock in the evening, and so intensely cold that most people who had a home of any kind to go to had sought its shelter.

On this wintry night, however, a slight girlish figure, well wrapped up, might have been seen hurrying rapidly along. It was Grace Murray, who had been detained by the bedside of a young girl dying of consumption. Her mother and Mary knew where she was, and would feel no uneasiness, and she herself was not troubled with nervous fears. Still it

was late for her to be out alone, and she was making what speed she could to get home.

As she drew near the bridge which crossed the river Warne, she saw something that caused her to slacken her pace.

The figure of a young man stood leaning against the bridge, apparently watching the deep water as it rushed rapidly along below. He appeared to have no great-coat or other protection against the cold, and the folded arms, the bowed head, the whole attitude betokened utter hopelessness and dejection.

It was not this, however, that caused Grace to pause, but the fact that something in the outline of the figure struck her as strangely familiar, and as she drew nearer she found she was not mistaken—that it was indeed her old playmate, Laurie Conroy. Deeply shocked at his appearance, she yet did not hesitate a moment what course to pursue. Going up to him, she touched his elbow, saying, “Laurie!”

He started violently, and turned round like a hunted creature at bay ; but Grace at once saw that, though his face was haggard, his eyes bloodshot, he was not then the worse for drink.

“ You here alone at this time of night, Grace ! ” he exclaimed, making a strong effort to speak naturally.

“ Shocking, is it not ! but I have been with a poor sick girl, and now you will see me home, will you not ? ”

“ I ! ” laughed Laurie, recklessly. “ Do you think I look the sort of fellow to escort a young lady home ? I have a little more respect for your character than that. What, in the name of fortune, would your respectable friends say if they met you with such a reprobate ? ”

“ Hush, Laurie,” entreated Grace, “ do not speak in that way. I cannot leave you here, come home with me.”

“ Nay, Grace, let me be ! ” he said more quietly, “ I shall be all right. Why should I not stand ‘ on the bridge at midnight,’ as well

as that fellow in the song we used to sing? By the way, Grace," he added suddenly, "if I should be missing to-morrow, don't think I have yielded to the wish, 'that the ebbing tide would bear me away on its bosom.' I was in twenty minds of letting it do so when you came up, but all that is past and gone." The poor fellow shivered violently, his teeth chattering in his head as he spoke, with the intense cold.

"Laurie," exclaimed Grace again, "you will be ill if you expose yourself in this mad way. You are in some trouble I can see, and I am not going to leave you. Come home with me; Mary will have some hot coffee ready; you shall have that, and then go where you like. Do come! See, I am shivering with cold, waiting for you."

He still hesitated, but she saw she had gained an advantage, and hastened to follow it up. Laying her hand on his arm, she continued,

"Laurie, I entreat you, by our old happy play-days at Lynton, come with me."

At the mention of Lynton he turned away, gulping down a great sob, but she had conquered. He said in a somewhat gruff and surly tone, in which, nevertheless, there was a suspicion of tears, "Well, an obstinate woman must have her way—we cannot stay here all night," and walked silently on by her side.

She was much afraid he would escape her when they arrived at her own door, but he did not attempt to do so, and saying to Mary, who opened it, "Mr. Laurie has been kind enough to see me home, bring in some sandwiches as well as coffee for him," she led him into their little room.

The crimson curtains were drawn, a bright fire burned on the hearth, everything looked the picture of warmth and comfort. She made him sit down on the easy-chair while she took her things off.

"Where did you have tea and dinner?" she asked, noticing his white face.

"Nowhere," was the reply. "I came back from Lynton at nine o'clock, but I have not tasted food since breakfast-time."

"You poor boy, you may well look white and miserable; I shall not ask you another question until you have had something," and she busied herself in pouring out the hot fragrant coffee, and handing him the tempting sandwiches, which Mary had quickly made. He ate them with evident enjoyment; exposure and want of food had, it was plain, greatly aggravated his mental distress.

"Grace," he said at last, "you have been awfully good to me to-night; I don't quite know what you have saved me from, but I was feeling pretty nearly desperate when you came up. My own father and sister had cast me off, and let me go to the bad, so I felt I might as well make short work of it."

"Now, Laurie," Grace said, seating herself on

a low chair by the fire, "you shall tell me all your trouble if you can. Things are seldom so bad but there is some way of mending them."

"Ah!" he said bitterly, "fool that I was, I was thinking that it might be so; but no, Grace, you have done all you can for me, but you cannot save me from the consequences of my own folly and sin. Nellie might, but she was too much taken up with her own concerns to care what became of me; all her anxiety was to get me away before Edward came in.

And bit by bit, drawn on by her gentle sympathy, the poor lad told his story. A story, alas! only too common! We will tell it in fewer and more connected words than Laurie was able to do.

When he had first come to Warminster, an inexperienced boy of eighteen, his handsome face and gentleman-like address had secured him admittance into a set of fast fashionable young men, all of them considerably his elders,

and possessed of much larger means than himself, who proceeded to initiate him into what they called "life."

Flattered by their notice, he fell a ready victim, and soon found he had greatly outrun his salary; at first he applied to his father to help him out of his difficulties, and Dr. Conroy, with a sharp reproof for his extravagance, had paid his debts, but each time the reprimand had become more severe, until, at last, his father told him plainly he was helping him for the last time: he could, and would do no more for him. Then one of his companions, young Courtney, a fellow-clerk with himself at the bank, stepped in with the insidious temptation, why not try his luck a little on the turf? it was a thing done constantly by men of the world, and he could take care not to risk much. There was one horse that, it was well known in sporting circles, was certain to win; why not back it, and make a pot of money?

Laurie was desperately in want of money, and

jumped at this easy way of making it. He had no right principle to guide him in the matter ; in his eyes, it was the risk, and not the sin, which constituted the evil of gambling. Unfortunately, his first ventures were uniformly successful, and so he was drawn on further and further. At last there came a change of luck, and he had losses, not very great in the eyes of experienced gamblers, but more than he could meet ; and last week, being urgently pressed to pay a debt of honour, he took the fatal step of appropriating fifty pounds belonging to the bank. It was only a loan ! so he told himself, his salary was due in a month, he would then replace it at once, there was no possibility of detection, and it should be a lesson to him ; he would turn over a fresh leaf.

But no amount of sophistry would still an uneasy conscience ; from the time of touching the money he was restless and miserable, feeling, as he told Grace, that he was, in plain language, a thief. All the latent honesty and uprightness

of his character rose up in revolt against what he had become. He saw now in its true light the course he had been pursuing, and longed for the time when, the money being replaced, he could once more feel himself an honest man.

But that morning a whisper had run through the bank that had filled him with horror; owing to some slight irregularities in another department, one of the principals was coming down (it was a branch bank), and no doubt all accounts would be strictly looked into.

Scarcely knowing what he did, he asked and obtained leave of absence for the afternoon, and, without going near his lodgings, took the train for Lynton. There he found Dr. Conroy, angry and inexorable; he could not bring himself to confess the actual state of things, and his father, supposing it to be merely an ordinary debt, dismissed him, saying, that "as he had made his bed so he must lie in it."

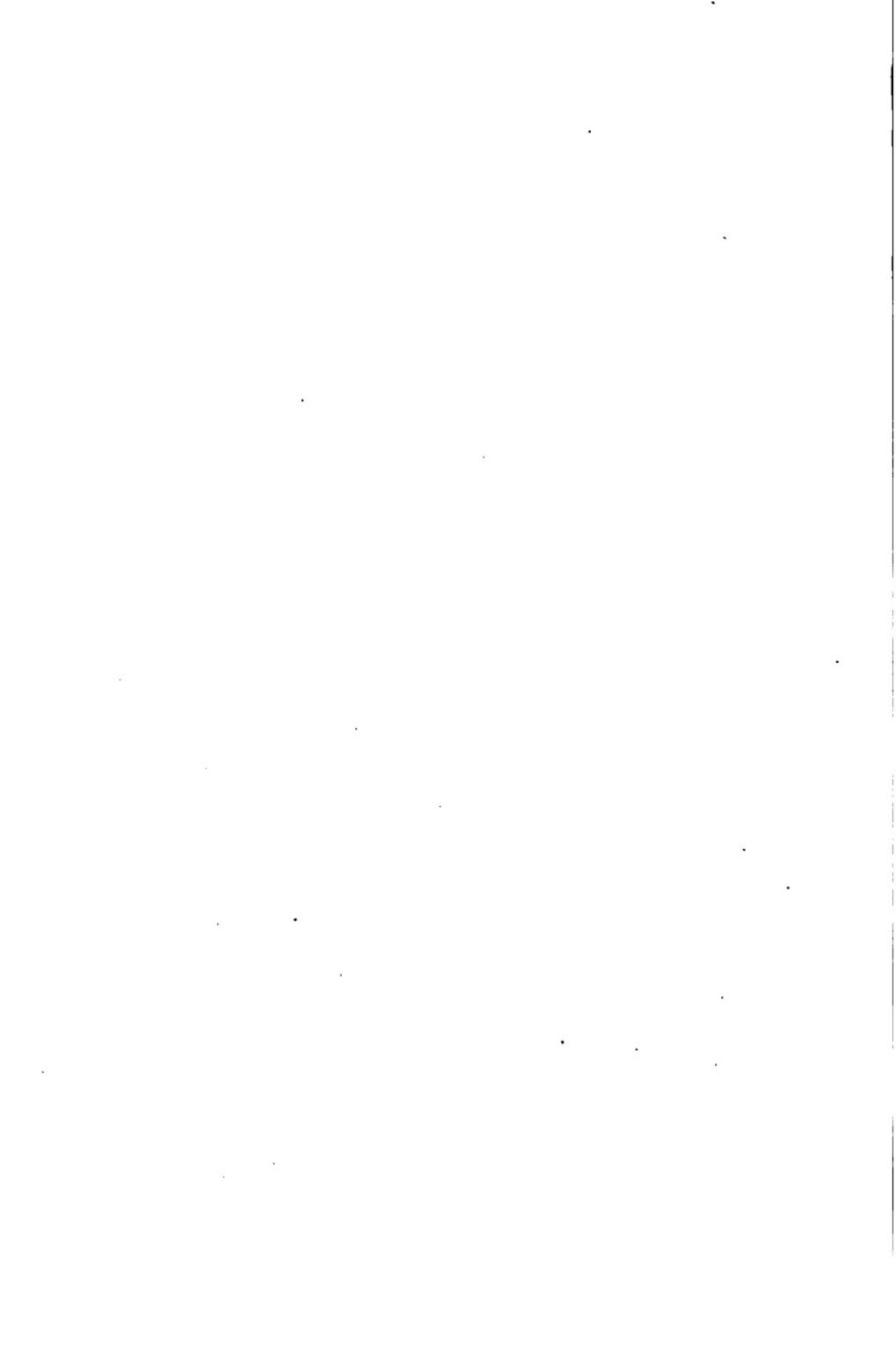
He then went to Nellie, and told her all, that ruin and disgrace awaited him, unless she

could help him ; but absorbed in her own concerns, she hardly seemed to realise it ; *she* was in trouble, she told him, for Edward had been more angry with her than she had ever seen him in her life, that morning, on account of a milliner's bill that had been sent to him. He had told her plainly, they could not afford to go on as she was doing, "So ! for pity's sake, Laurie," she concluded, "do go before he comes home ; you will find some of your friends in town to help you."

Grace could hardly repress her indignation as she heard this ; and when Laurie went on to say how, after having applied, in vain, to some of his so-called friends, he had paused, on the bridge where she encountered him, and, in his utter misery and despair, had met, and wrestled with, the terrible temptation to end all in the dark current of that river, the tears fell fast from Grace's eyes ; and she laid her hand gently on the bowed head, as she said, "My poor Laurie ! Thank God, I did meet you."



"My poor Laurie! Thank God I did meet you."—*Page 184.*



"Aye, Grace!" he rejoined, "I can say, thank God too, for that: you have saved me from the blackness of despair," he said with a shudder. ' But I cannot face the exposure and shame. I cannot think of my father's grey head looking at me, as I stand in the felon's dock. I shall work my passage to America in disguise; work hard and fare hard until I have saved the money. When I have paid that back, I shall feel I can lift up my head amongst honest men, and I shall come back and face the consequences; they will not be too hard on me then."

"Wait here a little, Laurie," said Grace, rising, "we must think of something better than that." And so saying she left the room.

In a very few moments she returned, and placing five ten-pound notes in Laurie's hand, said, "Take these; there will be a far better chance of retrieving your position by staying here."

He looked up, utterly amazed; knowing their

circumstances, he had not dreamed that Grace would be able to help him in that way. She did not tell him how carefully the money had been stored up for a long-wished-for visit to London ; but he knew well how hard she had worked for it.

His manliness utterly broke down at the sudden revulsion of feeling, from despair to hope, and for a few minutes he sobbed like a child. Poor lad ! he was barely twenty.

Then looking up, with the light of a steadfast purpose in his face, he said, "Grace, this has been a lesson to me for life : it has, I hope, made a man of me. I shall never rest until I have repaid you this money, but I can never repay what you have done for me."

"There is one way in which you can more than repay me," she said, "if you will give me your solemn promise to break with your false friends and never to be tempted into gambling in any shape or form."

"Grace !" he said earnestly, holding out his

hand to her, "I give you my word of honour, that, from this day forth, I will break with all those friends who have led me into extravagance and wrong, and that, God helping me, I will neither touch intoxicating drink, play for money, or gamble in any way. It will not be easy for me, for I have gone farther wrong than you think; but I should hold myself the meanest and most contemptible scoundrel that ever walked this earth, if I broke my word given to you under such circumstances."

"I can trust you, Laurie," was the reply; "and I am more than repaid. But now, it is too late to rouse them up at your lodgings; so I will ask Mary to bring you some pillows and blankets. You must make yourself comfortable on the couch before the fire, and I must go to my mother." And without waiting for more thanks, she left him.

Mary was rather crusty at the request made to her. She had been kept out of her bed too

long, and the whole household had been sadly disarranged, all for that young ne'er-do-weel, as she in her heart called him. But Grace managed to pacify her, and she went and made him as comfortable as she could.

It was long before Grace retired to bed, for Mrs. Murray, who had been listening anxiously upstairs, wondering what the unusual commotion might mean, had to be told the whole story. Laurie's secret was safe with her, and there was only one concealment that Grace permitted herself to have from her mother.

Long before Grace opened her eyes the next morning, Laurie had departed. Mary said he was going without any breakfast, but she had made him have some, by telling him Miss Grace would be very angry if she let him do so. He had left a hastily pencilled note with these words : "You will see me in three weeks from to-day ; do not, in the meantime, fear that I shall forget my promise." Grace understood that that was the time for him to receive his

salary, and that he would not come until he could pay off, at least, some part of the debt.

Her work was particularly absorbing just now. The examination was drawing very near, and she was also finishing a picture which she hoped to get hung in one of the London spring Exhibitions. Mr. Wilson, who came to spend a day with them, was delighted with her progress. He asked Grace if she had seen anything of Laurie lately; he had heard of his having been at Lynton, looking very seedy and disreputable, and that his father and he had quarrelled. Grace simply said that she had seen him, and she hoped he was doing much better.

"I am glad of that," said Mr. Wilson, "for I fear poor Conroy has a good deal of anxiety just now. Things are not going on well at the Somerville's; their extravagance has been something outrageous, or rather I should say hers, for Edward's only fault has been not keeping a

tighter hand over his beautiful wife. However, I think he has learned a lesson, and will do so now."

Mr. Wilson little guessed how this news grieved Grace. Her unselfish nature could have rejoiced in Edward's happiness, and now she longed intensely to share his anxiety and to help him. She knew that an addition was shortly expected to their household, and she thought "surely Nellie will be less thoughtless when she has her child to consider."

The three weeks passed, and Grace and Mrs. Murray were seated at tea when Mary opened the door and admitted Laurie. Both noticed a manifest improvement in his appearance, an air of greater manliness and decision, though he looked somewhat ill and worn.

"Mrs. Murray," he said, "I know Grace has told you all. I could not come until I was able to bring this; you shall have the rest soon. I had some other debts to discharge or I could have paid all."

Grace looked at the packet he placed in her hands. It was twenty-five pounds.

"But, Laurie," she said, "I do not think you can spare all this yet; you must remember you have your quarter's expenses."

"I know that, you wise business woman," he replied with a smile; "but I have changed my lodgings, and have also got some copying to do for a lawyer in the evenings. I must get back to it now."

"Not until you have had some tea," said Mrs. Murray, kindly; "you can spare that long from your work."

"As far as the time goes, yes!" returned the young man; "but if I made one promise to Grace that night, I made another to myself, that I would not allow myself any pleasure, nor would I mix on equal terms with my equals, until I had wiped out (as far as might be) my disgrace, and had paid every penny I owed. You will not tempt me to break my promise, I know."

"No; I will rather bid you 'God-speed,'" said Mrs. Murray, while Grace held out her hand to him without speaking. He warmly returned its pressure, and left without another word.

"Do you remember, some years ago, remarking that there was 'good stuff in Laurie ?' I was contrasting him with Edward," observed Mrs. Murray. "I scarcely agreed with you then, but I do now. He has set to work to recover himself with a steadiness of purpose I did not think him capable of. I believe this has been the turning-point of his life, and he may make a nobler man than he would have done if he had never fallen."

But Grace's heart was too full to answer her.

## CHAPTER XIII.

"MISS GRACE MURRAY: art scholarship, value fifty pounds per annum for three years. Highly commended for drawings from the antique. Silver medal, for study of still life." Such was the announcement that electrified the little household at Stanley Terrace.

The result of the examination first reached Mr. Lydgate, and he hastened across at once to tell the Murrays. As Mary came to the door, he told her first. She at once forgot her manners, opened the room door where Grace and her mother were sitting, gave Grace a violent hug, then, as was her custom under the influence of any strong emotion, threw her apron over her head, and with a sob of delight retired to the kitchen.

Mr. Lydgate laughed, and asked Grace if she were going to follow suit. Then, turning to Mrs. Murray, he said, "I never was better pleased at a pupil's success, for Miss Grace has well earned it by her conscientious, indefatigable work."

It was then unanimously agreed that, as the school of art was closed for the holidays, the doctor should be consulted, and, if he gave Mrs. Murray permission to undertake the journey, they should all go and enjoy a well-earned rest at Caerleon Bay, a lovely little Welsh watering-place.

The requisite permission was soon obtained ; but we will not follow them to their pleasant retreat, where Grace revelled in the beautiful sea and mountain scenery, and grew almost a child again, wandering on the sea-shore and amongst the hills, making friends with the simple peasant folk.

It was the first real holiday she had had since her father's death, and she gained health and

strength daily, enabling her to return to her work with new vigour and delight. Mrs. Murray, too, was greatly benefited by the change; and it was quite a merry little party that assembled at the tea-table the first evening after their return, where Mrs. Murray and Grace were joined by Laurie Conroy, who, handing Grace a little parcel, said, with a significant smile, "I will have tea with you this evening, if you will ask me, Mrs. Murray."

After tea was over, and Mary had left the room, he told them that he now felt himself a free man, having paid off everything. Also, that the managers of the bank had offered him a situation at a considerably higher salary to go out to Canada, and he had accepted it thankfully, for he felt it would be easier to begin afresh amongst different surroundings. "And I hope, one day, you will have no reason to be ashamed of your friend, Grace."

"I am proud of him now," answered Grace warmly.

He looked at her earnestly for a moment, and then turned away.

"I shall go to Lynton next week to say good-bye ; and, Grace," he said softly, "I shall tell my father all. I shall feel happier when I have done so. If he does not despise me, I shall be able to look any one in the face."

And so they parted ; each to pursue their own work, to tread their own appointed way ; but a light had been shed on his pathway by the influence of her pure unselfish life which would never again suffer him to wander into the dark ways of sin and folly.

One episode more, and we will leave them for awhile.

About six months later Grace found a Canadian letter lying on the breakfast table. She opened it, and as she read, the colour deepened on her cheeks ; this was the passage she had come to :—

"There has been one thought ever present since we parted ; one hope that has been

like a bright star, shining down on the darkness of my pathway, and cheering me onward, and upward. It has been this, that one day, when I have proved myself more worthy of you, you will accept the life you have saved, and which your love alone can make perfectly happy. Grace! I am not worthy of you; you are, and ever will be, far above me, but all that a life of entire devotion can do to make you happy shall be done, if you will but let me hope that, in time, I may claim you for my own, and share your care for your mother."

The letter was folded up carefully, and named to no one; and as she sat at her desk that night, after her mother had gone to bed, one or two tears fell on the paper before her. But the answer was clear and decided:—

"Dear Laurie," she wrote, "it cannot be; and though I grieve for the pain I am inflicting now, I know that one day you will thank me. I cannot give you the love you

ask. I am older than you, not only in years but in character; and forgive me if I say I do not think you quite understand your own feelings yet. Some day, when your home is gladdened with a bright young wife, who looks up to you, and leans on you, as a wife ought to lean on her husband, you will come to me and say; 'Sister Grace, you were right and I was wrong; my love for you was esteem, gratitude if you will, but not the one love of a lifetime.' Till then, believe me ever, your true and loving friend and sister,

**GRACE MURRAY."**

## CHAPTER XIV.

ONCE again, as we sit gazing into the flickering firelight, the scene changes, not now into a sunny garden, but into a quiet room, where a solitary form is sitting alone in the gathering twilight. Her hands are idly folded on her lap, where a letter, which she has evidently just finished reading, lies open. There is an expression of deep sadness on the calm fair face; beautiful, with a beauty which belongs rather to advancing years than to early youth, for it is a beauty altogether independent of form and feature, and indeed is but the reflection of a beautiful soul within. Yet the lady is not old, rather, she is just standing on the border-land of that middle age, which the poet says,

"by no fond wile, no soothing charm is blest."

The deep mourning dress she wears is rich and handsome, and her whole surroundings be token refinement, and even luxury.

Surely we have seen both the room and its occupant before. We look closer, and recognise the little room at No. 2 Stanley Terrace, which has gained with age a character and respectability of its own, and is no longer a red brick tenement, distinguished only by its number. Time, whose softening hand has toned down its outer walls, has gathered within them all those little trifles and associations that seem to make a place "home."

There are silver threads in the soft brown hair, but the broad white brow, the clear, earnest grey eyes, the figure, slight and girlish even yet, can belong to no other than Grace Murray.

Sixteen years have passed since we last saw her. For sixteen years the current of her life

has flowed on, deepening and widening, like the bed of the river, as it draws near, and yet nearer to the mighty ocean.

Grace Murray is no longer a struggling, unknown artist. Her pictures find a place on the walls of the Royal Academy. Her old acquaintance, Mr. Dominic, rubs his hands with delight, when she can let him have one to exhibit in his window, and never tires of telling his friends and patrons the story of their first interview, and his early recognition of her talent. Nay, one small picture of hers now commands a price which, in old days, would have seemed boundless wealth to her mother and herself. She is a welcome guest, too, in the best society which Warminster affords, as well as in the gloomy courts and alleys, where there are so many “to rise up and call her blessed.” And, though still quiet and retiring, she is able to hold her own in conversation, and to draw around her all that is best and most cultivated in any society in which she is placed.

But, if time has brought a wider life, new and valued friendships; life's current has also swept away much that these can never replace. And we will go back a little, gathering up the threads of the story, and seeing what changes time has brought, before we look at her letter, and try to discover what has caused such an unwonted cloud of sadness to darken her brow.

It is long since Mr. Wilson was laid to rest beneath the walls of the old church, where he had laboured so long and so faithfully. A new and energetic vicar fills his place, and the parish is thoroughly well worked. But there are some who question whether, in the multiplicity of services, and the intricacies of parish organisation, they do not miss the genuine heart-to-heart sympathy and fellowship which existed between the pastor and his flock, when good Mr. Wilson not only "pointed to heaven," but "showed the way."

Mrs. Somerville, too, "after life's fitful fever,"

"sleeps well" in that quiet churchyard. Her last hours were watched over by Grace with a daughter's loving care ; for Edward was far away. A good appointment in one of the hill districts of India being offered him, it was felt by all that he did wisely in accepting it, and thus extricating himself from the difficulties in which his wife's extravagance had involved him. It is years since Grace has heard from him or Nellie ; though news sometimes reaches her, and she has heard of the death of their two eldest children, and Nellie's ill health, through Ethel, now Lady Hartley, in whose handsome, well-managed house she is always a welcome guest. Grace looks with admiration on the ten fine healthy children, and the large establishment, which Ethel rules over with all her mother's practical good sense, firmness, and worldly wisdom, softened and warmed by a little of her father's gemiality.

There is no mistake about it, that Ethel is in her right place. Dr. and Mrs. Conroy are still

living ; the doctor's great delight is in the letters of his son, who has earned for himself a good position, and an honoured name in his new home. Grace, too, frequently hears from him ; for her prophecy has proved true, and his Rose, his "home sunshine," as he calls her, looks on Grace as her best friend.

Her husband has told her his whole story ; but I am afraid Rose's moral sense is, in this instance, a little obtuse, for nothing would persuade her that Laurie is not, and has not always been, the noblest and truest of men. Their one little daughter is named Grace ; and Rose sends Grace word that already she can point out her likeness, and kisses her little dimpled hand to "good Auntie Grace over the sea."

Last of all, only eight months since, Mrs. Murray passed away, calmly and peacefully, as she had lived. She was conscious to the last, but had no suffering, while the gloom of the dark valley was so illumined by her happy faith, that it scarcely seemed death, rather a

transition into a brighter world, that bore her away from them ; and Grace, even in the first bitterness of bereavement, felt it almost wrong to mourn.

The days were often grey and cheerless down here, amidst the fogs and clouds of earth ; but where her mother was, it was all unclouded sunshine ; and she thought still, as she had always done, first of her mother, last of herself.

She goes on living in the same little house, watched over and cared for by Mary, whose faithful services have long been supplemented by those of a neat, trim little maid, and who is looked upon by Grace more as a friend than a servant.

More than one have tried to win Grace for themselves, but for all she has had the same answer.

People said, "Miss Murray will never marry while her mother lives."

But when, a few months after her mother's

death, one whom she esteemed and honoured beyond all other men—Mr. Maurice—came and asked her to be his helpmeet, sharing his labours, and filling, as only she could fill, the vacant place in his lonely home, the answer, given, it is true, with tears, was still the same.

“Only, dear friend,” she begged, “do not let me lose the friendship I most value, because I cannot give you more than the love of a friend.”

And Mr. Maurice answered, “You shall not, Grace. I had fondly hoped that it might be otherwise, but I value your friendship too highly to relinquish it. Forget that I have ever spoken.”

And so, alone, working busily at her art, always cheerful, spending and being spent in the service of others, she has lived on, until the night when we again take up her story.

A gentle tap at the door roused her from

her meditations, and Mary entered with the lights.

"Miss Grace, what is troubling you?" she asked anxiously; and, at the words, Grace threw her arms round her old nurse's neck, and sobbed like a child. Like a child, too, the faithful creature soothed and petted her, greatly distressed by her tears, for it was so unlike Grace to give way.

"See, Mary," she said, at last, "read this! It is wrong and foolish of me to do in this way, but I had almost forgotten the money, and it seems so sad that it should come back now *she* is gone, and there are none to share it with me."

Mary sought for her glasses, and slowly read out the letter Grace had handed to her. It was a business-like epistle, kindly and courteously worded, from Mr. Birch, enclosing an acquittance for all liabilities contracted by the late Mr. Murray, and intimating that the income which had so long gone to discharge them would now return to Miss Murray. He was

commissioned by the creditors to convey an assurance of their warm esteem and respect, and to forward, per rail, a small silver salver as a substantial token of the same.

“Whatever shall we do with our riches, Mary ?” asked Grace, with a faint attempt at a smile.

“Nay, Miss Grace, I’ll answer for you finding a way to get rid of them. But it is sad for ye, my lamb, to be all alone. Ah ! if you would but listen, there’s two or three, even my old eyes can see, would give more than gold for your——.”

“Hush, hush !” cried Grace, now laughing ; “you will arouse me effectually if you talk in that way. How dare you ? to a person of my age. No ; we must take this money as a trust, and try to use it faithfully.”

The next morning Grace got to her work as usual, but work seemed to have lost its zest, now that there was no longer any necessity

for it, and she felt strangely depressed and weary.

It was a dull, dreary day, and as she toyed idly with her brush, she looked through the window, and watched, with a sensation of pity, the postman hurrying along through the drizzling rain. Was he coming up the walk ? Yes ; but Grace hardly looked up from her drawing as the maid laid a letter on the table. "There were no letters now," she thought sadly, "that could bring her either joy or sorrow."

In a little while, however, she took it up, and started violently at the sight of the Indian postmark, and Edward's well-known handwriting. She opened it quickly, and read as follows :—

"Dear Grace, my earliest and best friend,—I know not whether tidings have yet reached you of my Nellie's death, but I write to convey to you her last request and mine ; for, after laying her beside our two little ones in this far-off land,

I am returning a broken-down and worn-out man, and scarcely know whether I shall live to see the three children who still are spared to me in an English home. You will have heard that our youngest child, our little May, owing to an injury to her spine when she was a baby, has never walked. She is a clinging, loving little creature of eight, beautiful and frail both in mind and body. Hugh and Nellie will, I suppose, have to go to their aunt Ethel's, but neither Nellie nor I could bear the thought of our tender little one knocked about amongst Ethel's strong, healthy children ; and over and over again she begged me to 'ask Grace to take her : she will make her true and brave to endure her affliction.' She talked much of you, Grace, in those last days ; calm, peaceful days they were, perhaps the happiest of our married life.

"And now if you will, for the sake of our old friendship, have my child, it will take away my last regret in leaving them. I shall settle

what little I have on May, that she may not be a burden to you. The others, when they are brought up and educated, will be able to fight their own way. Hugh is already a fine, manly lad, thoughtful and considerate beyond his years ; and my bright Nellie is her mother over again. If you can make up your mind, and write at once, the letter will reach here before we leave. We sail in the *Atlantis* on the 19th of April. If I live to reach England, we shall meet again. God bless and keep you till then.—  
Your friend,

“ EDWARD SOMERVILLE.”

## CHAPTER XV.

GRACE read this letter with very mingled feelings; there was sorrow for the bright young companion of her childhood, thus cut off in her youth and beauty; and for him who had all unknowingly so gained her first love, that no other could ever fill his place; but her whole heart went forth in yearning love and tenderness towards the little ones, so soon to be left orphans, and in glad thanksgiving that God had given her this most sacred charge. She resolved that not May alone, but Hugh and Nellie should share her home and her love, if their father would permit it. Now, she could indeed be thankful for the money which had seemed such a useless burden only

a few short hours before. She hastened to write her letter.

"Let me have all the children," she said, "little May would be lonely, separated from her brother and sister. I am well able to provide for them, they will be no burden; rather, I shall receive them as one of God's best gifts to me, and love and cherish them as my own. Ethel cannot need them as I do; she has her own children, and I am all alone."

"And you, dear Edward, if you reach England safely, as I trust you may, will you not share your children's home? You know Mary's skill as a nurse; come, and let us do all we can for you." She said little more; words would not come, but she set to work at once to prepare for the travellers, and Mary marvelled at her energy and brightness.

The little house must be left, and another found—not too far from town, for Hugh would have to attend the grammar school. Servants, too, must be provided, and all made comfortable

and homelike before they arrived. With so much to be done, the time of waiting would not seem long.

Looking over the long list of advertisements, a name caught Grace's eye—"The Priory."

"Let us go and see what it is like, Mary," she said; "I should like it for the sake of the name."

They found it resembled the old home in nothing except in name; it was an old-fashioned rambling house, with wainscoted rooms and long winding passages, and had a large garden full of roses, pinks, southernwood, and lavender, and a sloping lawn, on which were placed little knots of trees here and there, forming quiet nooks and corners to tempt the children to games at hide-and-seek. It stood a little way back from one of the principal thoroughfares leading into the country, and Grace at once decided it was the very place for them.

What delightful work it was, lining the nest and making it soft and warm and beautiful for

the nestlings. All the old furniture had to be removed to it; that was sacred with memories of the past, but there needed much besides. There was a guest-chamber to be fitted up, with every appliance for the comfort of the invalid who was first to occupy it; the dressing-room would do for Hugh, who would like to be near his father.

A little room near her own was converted into the daintiest little bower imaginable for May; and a reclining-chair provided, which, moving easily on springs, would enable them to take the child from one room to another without fatigue. Nothing that loving foresight could devise was forgotten.

Her mother's things were placed in her own room; she had used them ever since her death. And a studio had to be fitted up with care, for, as she laughingly told Mary, she could not afford to neglect her profession now she had a family to provide for.

It was not without a pang of keen regret that

Grace bade adieu to the little house that had sheltered her so long, and which had been hallowed by her mother's presence ; but the time was so short, and she was kept so busy, she had not leisure to dwell on her feelings. At last all was completed ! At last, too, the time arrived for the *Atlantis* to reach England ; and Grace resolved to go, accompanied by Mary, to meet the travellers when they landed at Southampton.

Amongst the busy crowd, the noise and bustle of arrival, they stood, eagerly scanning each face. Grace was very calm and quiet, she had so dreaded the meeting, but now it seemed as if a hand had been laid upon her heart, stilling its restless throbbing, and giving her perfect peace.

There was no hurry, no excitement, even when at last she recognised the tall well-known figure, wasted and bowed down with sickness, and leaning heavily on the shoulder of the bright, handsome boy by his side, to whose hand a golden-haired little girl of nine or ten years old clung tightly, and who seemed to have consti-

tuted himself protector both of father and sister; a respectably-dressed woman came close behind, carrying another child, of whom little could be seen for the wraps in which she was enveloped.

Quietly, Grace made her way to them, and, touching Edward's arm, said, "Mary and I have come to see to things for you; we have two cabs ready here."

A flush of pleasure came to his pale face, as he said, "This *is* good of you; Grace, I never expected this."

He, the two children, and Grace got into one cab, leaving Mary to follow with the luggage and their attendant in the other. But when Grace asked, "Can I not take May?" the woman placed her in her arms, and, turning to Edward, said respectfully, "Perhaps, as your friends have met you, sir, you will not need me any more."

He looked questioningly at Grace, saying, "Mrs. White was only engaged to take charge of May on the voyage, and will, I daresay, be glad to join her friends."

"Then I am sure we shall not need her!" was the ready answer, "you see Mary is with me," and, as she spoke, Grace gazed down at the little bundle in her arms, and met a pair of deep violet eyes looking up into hers, while two small, thin arms were put round her neck, and the child nestled to her with a contented sigh, murmuring, "Good Auntie Grace." At that moment Grace knew something of that deep thrill of tender love and thankfulness with which a mother gazes for the first time on the little one whom God has given to her. Her eyes were full of tears, as turning to Edward she said softly, "This is indeed a precious gift."

Hugh and Nellie made friends with her at once, and their childish talk was a relief to both their elders. Grace noticed, however, that Hugh cast anxious glances from time to time at his father, to see if they were wearying him; or if his cushions needed arranging.

Grace had thought it would be less fatiguing to have a saloon sleeping carriage, and proceed

at once home, than to stay all night at an hotel, and Edward thankfully acquiesced in the arrangement, saying with a sad smile, "There is rest in the very name of home."

Accordingly, after having had some refreshment, the travellers proceeded at once to the station, and were soon on their way comfortably resting on the couches of the carriage which Grace had previously secured.

The children were asleep directly, and Edward, after one or two fits of coughing, which seemed completely to exhaust him, also closed his eyes. Nellie and May did not even rouse up when the train reached their destination, and had to be carried to the cab; but Hugh was wide awake, ready to assist his father, while Grace and Mary looked after their things.

Arrived at the Priory, the maids took the two little sleepy girls, undressed them, and deposited them in their cosy beds, while Grace showed Edward and Hugh at once to their own room, where a bright fire burned, refresh-

ments were laid out, and every possible provision made for the comfort of the invalid : then bidding Hugh not fail to ask for anything they might need, she left them ; and after a last kiss, and a last look at her children, she retired to her own room.

We will not follow her there. There are moments in life when the heart needs to be entirely alone, and in which it is mere impertinence for the stranger to intermeddle, even in thought ; and this was one of them.

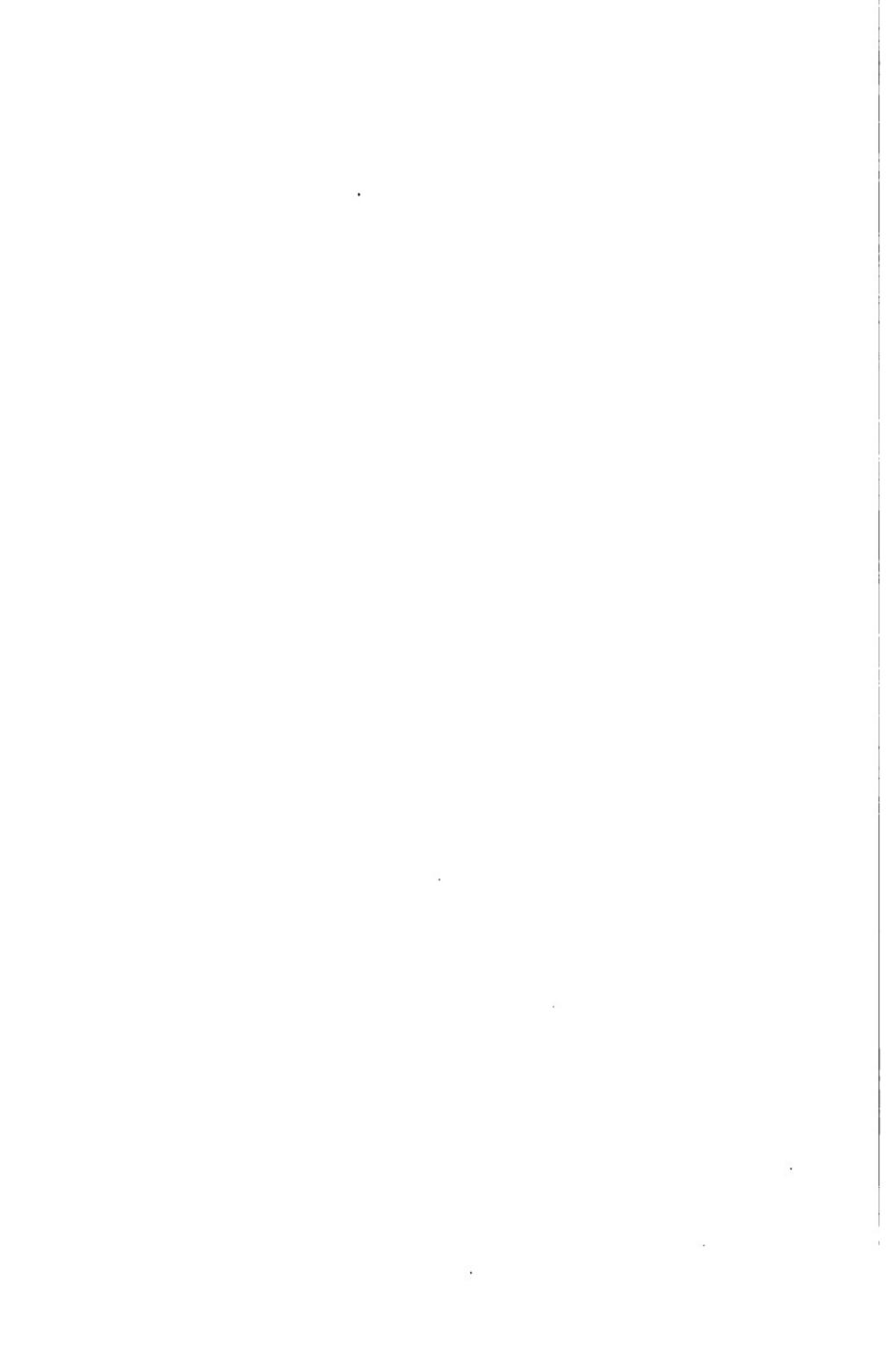
Next morning, Grace was shocked to see how ill and worn Edward looked ; it was but too plain that the end was not far off, and he himself did not seem to wish it otherwise, though he expressed great thankfulness that he had been permitted to reach England. "Now I have seen my children in this happy home, I have not a wish ungratified," he said.

Dr. Conroy, Ethel, and Alfred Hartley came to see him, and he gave to each some last



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"Now I have seen my children in this happy home, I have not a wish ungratified." —*Page 220.*



messages, and tokens of remembrance from Nellie. But only to Grace did he ever speak of the past, and of his wife.

To her he said, "It was all a sad mistake that time before we left England. Do not blame Nellie for it, even in thought, Grace, for I alone was to blame. She was but a child, untrained and inexperienced, and I, who ought to have shielded her from herself, was blinded by my love. It was a foolish, not a wise, true love; and, when things went wrong, I was hard and bitter. It is difficult to forgive oneself for such things; but she forgave me—all shadows passed away before the end. The loss of our children drew us together in a closer union of heart than there had ever been before, and soon, death will unite again the link that death has broken, and make us one for ever. Her last wish is fulfilled in you having the children. Over and over again, she said, 'If they could but be with Grace, I should be content; she would train them better

than I could do, not only for this life but for the next.””

The tears fell fast from Grace’s eyes as she listened ; tears that had no passion and no bitterness in them ; such tears as those of which the poet writes, they

“ Are the showers that fertilise this world,”

and she answered, “ God helping me, Edward, I will do so ; while I live they shall never know the want of a mother’s love and tenderness. My heart was very lonely, but they have come to fill and satisfy it.”

The children were delighted with their new home ; they were too young fully to realise the dark shadow that hung over them. Everything was new, and everything was charming, and they clung to their new auntie, as they called her, as the best of all their possessions.

Their father could not bear to cloud their happiness with thoughts of the approaching separation ; but for Hugh he had a few last words.

The boy was sitting by his side as he loved to do, holding his wasted hand in his.

"My boy," his father said, "you are old enough to understand what I am going to say. I want you to listen carefully, and to remember my words as long as you live. I do not need to tell you that God is taking me from you very soon. Nay, do not grieve so bitterly, my child," he said, laying his hand fondly on the boy's head, as he struggled to control his sobs; "my race is almost run, and I am very weary, and glad to think of rest. Yours is but just beginning; see that it is an upward one; rise above all that is false or mean, impure or dishonourable. I am happy in leaving you and your sisters in this home, in the charge of my dearest friend. But, Hugh, you will soon be a man, and I commit it to you, as a sacred trust, that you give to Grace Murray the obedience, the respect, and the devotion of a son; when she is old, watch over her, and care for her, as you

would for your own mother had she been spared to you."

"Father! I promise you I will; you may trust me," said the boy, looking up with earnest, tearful eyes.

It was only the next day that the end came. Edward had not been worse than usual, but he had seemed to want to have the children near him; May's little chair had been drawn up by the side of his couch nearly all the day, and the child had lain contentedly, her hand clasped in her father's; but when the last rays of the setting sun were streaming in at the window, he bade them send Nellie and May away. Then beckoning Grace to draw nearer, while he still held Hugh's hand, he said, "It is coming. Kiss me, Grace. You will bring them with you. We shall meet again." Then turning to Hugh with a look of deepest love, he added faintly, "God bless you, my boy. Remember!"

Grace bent over him, and pressed a first and last kiss on the brow of the dying man. There

was one brief struggle, and all was over. Then putting her arm round the boy, she gently drew him from the room, and soothed his passionate weeping on her own aching heart.

They laid him to rest in a quiet churchyard outside the noise and bustle of the town. Grace liked it better than the crowded town cemetery ; and all through the summer evenings she and the children came, bringing flowers to lay on the grave.

Hugh set to work busily at his studies, which were at first carried on under a tutor, as his education had been neglected, and he was not up to other boys of his age at the Grammar School. However, he soon made up for lost time, and took his place amongst them, winning golden opinions from all. Foremost in all manly sports, he yet did not neglect his studies, and gained such a character for uprightness that one of the masters told Grace, “ I do not believe Hugh Somerville could tell a lie to save his life ! ”

Nellie, too, who was sent to a high-class day school near, developed into a lovely girl, with all her mother's brightness and beauty, but with an unselfishness and depth of character which, in her younger days, Nellie Conroy did not possess.

May, Grace taught herself; and under her loving influence the child's nature expanded like a beautiful flower in the warm sunshine. Never was a brighter, happier home than that old Priory, the long passages and panelled rooms resounding with sounds of mirth and frolic, and Grace herself joining in their games, and becoming, she used laughingly to say, a child for the first time in her life.

But the Priory was more than a sunny nest, where three young sheltered lives grew up in grace and beauty. It was also a centre of brightness to others, for Grace taught her children the lesson she herself had learned, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." That a life lived for self can never be a happy life; and

many a dark home in Warminster was brightened by the light that radiated from that centre.

Hugh chose to follow his father's profession, and strangers would often smile to see the tender respect, and chivalrous devotion which he bestowed on the little elderly lady, who evidently looked on him and his beautiful sister with a mother's pride.

It is Christmas Eve, the merry party assembled at the Priory have dispersed, and Nellie, enveloped in her crimson dressing-gown, has crept into her Aunt Grace's room for a last talk.

It has been an eventful day to her, for Claud Wilton, Mr. Maurice's curate, has openly sought and won a heart that has long been his; and no one can so sympathise with her as Aunt Grace.

"You must help me to be worthy of him," she is saying, as she kneels beside the low chair; "you will not lose me, you will rather gain

another son, for Claud feels toward you just as we do."

"Nay, my darling," is the answer, "do not think I shall grudge you your happiness; I always hoped that you and Hugh would make happy homes of your own, one day. I can safely trust my treasure to Claud's keeping, and I have one nestling who will never want to fly away."

"Aunt Grace;" the girl suddenly looks up, "I have often wondered, especially since I have known Claud, why——" here she hesitates— "I mean it seems sad that you——"

"That I should not have the love of husband and child of my own," Grace finishes the sentence for her with a smile. "My child, there was a time when I, too, felt that, but it is passed. I am perfectly content and happy with my lot; for, while I feel that a true marriage, such as I believe yours and Claud's will be, is in itself the most perfect life, I feel also that God has chosen my way, and that His purpose is

best for each individual soul. He knows what we each need, and never withholds the gift we long for without putting something better in its place. May He grant that, when you are as old as I am, you may be able to look back on your past life, and say, as I can, from the bottom of my heart, 'No good thing hath He withheld from me.'"

There is a picture which hangs in Grace Murray's morning-room ; it is one she has herself painted, and for which she has refused many offers. I do not know what value or what meaning she attaches to it ; but to me, who—though I have been, as I promised at the beginning, invisible throughout these pages—have watched her through all the changes and chances of her life, it is a parable picturing forth that life with wonderful truth and power.

A solitary pine-tree rears its slender form in perfect symmetry and beauty from a rocky mountain-side. All around are tokens of storm

and tempest; the torrent which rushes down, just beneath, bears with it uprooted trees and broken branches; huge boulder stones lie as they have fallen from the mountain peaks. The sky is black with heavy lurid clouds; yet somewhere, beyond the clouds, the sun is shining, and its rays have caught the upper branches of the pine-tree, and light it up as with a crown of glory. It has risen above the clouds and tempests of earth into the pure light and sunshine of heaven. And so has Grace.

THE END.

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